



**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT  
OF EDUCATION**

**TONY THURMOND**  
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF  
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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June 7, 2021

The Honorable Toni Atkins  
President pro Tempore, California State Senate  
State Capitol, Room 205  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Anthony Rendon  
Speaker, California State Assembly  
State Capitol, Room 219  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Nancy Skinner  
Chair, Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review  
State Capitol, Room 5019  
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting  
Chair, Assembly Committee on Budget  
State Capitol, Room 6026  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Legislative and Budget Committee Leaders:

RE: Governor's May Revise Broadband Proposal

I write to you today to urge you to support Governor Newsom's broadband for all proposal as outlined in the May Revision of the State Budget. Specifically, this proposal invests \$7 billion to provide access to high-quality and high-speed internet service for all Californians, allocating \$4 billion to a middle mile network and \$3 billion to a last mile infrastructure that will connect unserved and underserved rural, tribal, and urban communities across California.

As the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, I have seen firsthand the digital divide that separates Californians without internet connectivity from those who already have and depend on fast and reliable internet access as a normal part of their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exasperated this divide. Long-standing inequities in internet availability, affordability, and quality have persisted in our state for far too long. The lack of universal connectivity markedly hindered California's response to the pandemic, hampering the equitable delivery of distance learning, telework, telehealth, and e-commerce opportunities to all Californians. Closing the divide is now more urgent

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than ever, and the Governor's broadband proposal provides not only a historic level of investment, but also a historic opportunity for the Legislature to bridge the digital divide once and for all.

In a state that is proudly home to Silicon Valley, it is an injustice that there are so many Californians who are either priced out or shut out from accessing reliable broadband service. Communities across California, both unserved and underserved, need to be prioritized in the build out of an open access middle and last mile network. Failure to extend quality broadband connectivity to unserved and underserved communities across our state only deepens economic and social inequities and continues to hurt our most vulnerable, especially California's Black and Latino populations. Investing in an extensive middle mile and last mile open access broadband infrastructure will level the playing field when it comes to education, job training, health care, and economic opportunity. The Governor's May Revision proposal is a once-in-a-generation investment that will build out the middle and last mile broadband infrastructure, provide good paying jobs to thousands of Californians, lower costs, and make access to the "California Dream" available to all communities.

I know that the Legislature has introduced its own broadband proposal, but I fear that proposal does not do enough. Specifically, the Legislature's plan does not invest now; instead, it trickles money out over several budget years. It also lacks crucial details on how infrastructure dollars will be invested, omitting any "middle mile" language, a sector that is crucial to ensuring all Californians have access to high-quality service. Finally, the Legislature's plan keeps Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in control of this process, excluding vital reforms that put counties on a level playing field with existing providers and using General Fund dollars instead of Federal American Rescue Plan Act funds, which leaves ISPs in control of this process.

As the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, I want a broadband plan that prioritizes policies and programs that will help close the digital divide and bring universal broadband access to **all** Californians. For the above reasons, I strongly support Governor Newsom's \$7 billion proposal to invest in broadband infrastructure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tony Thurmond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tony" being more prominent than the last name "Thurmond".

Tony Thurmond

State Superintendent of Public Instruction