

August 14, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Governor Newsom,

We write to express our concerns about the recent decision to exclude most of San Mateo County Coastside from Phase 1 of the California Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative (MMBI).

Access to the internet is a necessity in order to learn, work, and function in the 21st century. It is not a luxury but a necessity in our day-to-day lives and our country's economic competitiveness which is why Congress and the Legislature have made substantial investments in closing the digital divide. In 2021, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act which invested \$65 billion in broadband affordability, equity, and deployment. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) recently announced that California will receive \$1.8 billion from this law. Separately, California has established its own Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative, a state program funded by \$3.25 billion in federal Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds provided by the American Rescue Plan Act.

As elected representatives of San Mateo County at the federal, state, and local level, we have prioritized ensuring that all parts of the County have reliable broadband access, particularly the unincorporated Coastside communities of Pescadero, Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada, Princeton, and Miramar. These communities are currently served by a single broadband connection that runs through La Honda, creating a single point of failure that leaves thousands of our constituents vulnerable to losing internet access when this connection fails. In addition, cellular service is slow, incomplete in coverage, and unreliable in emergencies. We've worked diligently with county officials, telecommunication providers, and Caltrans in an effort to bring redundant connectivity to the Coastside so residents and emergency services can communicate during emergencies. Unfortunately, cost is a major barrier, but the Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative can help address this challenge.

That's why we're particularly concerned that Middle-Mile Broadband Initiative recently deprioritized these underserved communities in San Mateo County by designating the Coastside as part of Phase 2 of the Initiative. Because current funding will only cover Phase 1 of the Initiative, this decision indefinitely postpones bringing reliable connectivity to the Coastside.

While we understand that funding is limited and insufficient to meet the state's entire 10,000-mile network goal, our constituents have been given no explanation for why their needs are considered less urgent than those in other parts of the state. The region is home to a large, vulnerable population of seniors, farmworkers, and low-income people. Cabrillo Unified School District, which serves students in Half Moon Bay and the Coastside, receives the sixth-lowest funding of any school district in San Mateo County.

The Coastside also faces unique vulnerability to natural disasters. This area has two major earthquake faults, is impacted by sea level rise, is in a very high wildfire risk zone, experiences major flooding, and has just one road for evacuation. Just this year, Coastside residents have faced a horrific shooting, damaging winds, and torrential rains damaging homes and roads. During these emergencies, access to the internet is vital for first responders to communicate and for residents to access emergency alerts and safety information, yet it is historically unreliable.

Given the pressing connectivity needs on the San Mateo County Coastside, we're requesting you to direct the relevant state agencies to reconsider their decision to designate the Coastside as part of Phase 2 of the MMBI, in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations, and that the agencies provide us and our constituents the criteria that were considered when determining which projects were prioritized for funding.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation and your attention to this critical vulnerability, and we look forward to your timely response.

Most gratefully,



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



Josh Becker
State Senator



Marc Berman
Assemblymember



Ray Mueller
San Mateo County Supervisor



Deborah Penrose
Mayor of Half Moon Bay



Gregg Dieguez
Chair, Midcoast Community Council



Patrick Horn
Chair, Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council



Sophia Layne
President, Cabrillo Unified School District
Governing Board

cc: Liana Bailey-Crimmins, Director, California Department of Technology
Alice Reynolds, President, California Public Utilities Commission
Tony Tavares, Director, California Department of Transportation