

COUNTY OF SONOMA  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

575 ADMINISTRATION DRIVE, RM. 100A  
SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA 95403

(707) 565-2241  
FAX (707) 565-3778



MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

CHRIS COURSEY  
CHAIR

DAVID RABBITT  
VICE CHAIR

SUSAN GORIN

JAMES GORE

LYNDA HOPKINS

December 12, 2023

Robert Osborn  
Communications Division Director  
California Public Utilities Commission  
505 Van Ness Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 954102

Re: Support for Golden State Connect Authority (GSCA) Applications in Sonoma County for Federal Last Mile Funding Account

Dear Director Osborn,

I am writing on behalf of the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors to express our support for the applications submitted by Golden State Connect Authority (GSCA) in Sonoma County for the Federal Funding Account last mile funding opportunity. GSCA worked directly with County of Sonoma staff to incorporate local considerations, and their application aligns closely with the overarching goals of providing equitable access to essential broadband services, a vision that is embedded in state legislation and policy such as Senate Bill 156 and Assembly Bill 414.

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors have taken significant action to close the internet availability gap and expand broadband access. In October 2021, the County joined Golden State Connect Authority (GSCA), a Joint Powers Authority comprised of and governed by supervisors of 39 rural California counties, to increase access to reliable, affordable high-speed internet. Since then, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors has continued to support GSCA's approach and resulting project proposals that will create an open access network, facilitate a competitive market, and result in more affordable prices for Sonoma County residents.

It is essential that we take every opportunity to advance our goals of digital equity and broadband inclusion, and GSCA's application for projects in Sonoma County is emblematic of this commitment. I have highlighted the key reasons for my support below.

**Leverage State Middle Mile Infrastructure**

GSCA's Sonoma County application effectively leverages the statewide middle mile infrastructure. This not only optimizes the use of public resources, but also ensures that the benefits of open access broadband infrastructure efficiently reach as many households and businesses as possible. By doing so,

we amplify the impact of our joint investments and work towards equitably closing the digital divide that persists in our region.

GSCA's las-mile project proposal provides a public, equitable solution to a persistent problem that has remained unresolved and exacerbated by reliance on private solutions and industry. GSCA's application is the embodiment and fulfillment of the solution that was recognized with the enactment of SB 156 and related rulemaking. From conversations with major internet service providers in our area, they have been clear that they do not intend to connect their publicly funded last mile networks to the statewide middle mile network. This is reflected in project applications for FFA. Therefore, funding of GSCA's public solution serves to efficiently and effectively build on existing public initiatives and infrastructure that otherwise will remain unconnected and thus, unutilized. Based on their demonstrated plans, funding of private approaches is misdirected use of the limited funding available to deliver on broadband infrastructure.

### **Promote Competition**

GSCA's application promotes competition through an open access network model. This approach fosters an environment where multiple companies can provide similar internet service over shared infrastructure, resulting in a diverse range of options for our residents and businesses. Competition not only drives innovation but also contributes to more affordable and high-quality broadband services, a vital aspect of our mission to make broadband accessible to all. Sonoma County residents continue to express frustration with the lack of options in their area and the apparent monopolies created by larger internet service providers. I urge the CPUC to prioritize applications that foster competition, not those that continue to rely on a select few players and the dynamics of private industry solutions.

### **Promote Equity and Inclusion**

GSCA's application prioritizes low-income areas as an equity measure for project selection. By recognizing the challenges and digital divide faced by economically underserved communities, we took a significant step towards ensuring that the benefits of broadband are distributed equitably. This approach aligns with the state's commitment for broadband for all, and it underscores our dedication to socioeconomic inclusion and the digital rights outlined in Assembly Bill 414. From analyzing the FFA project areas applied for by private entities in Sonoma County, only three of the thirteen project areas applied for fall below 80% of Sonoma County's median household income.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to seeing these vital projects come to fruition and work to close the digital divide in our community.

Sincerely,

Chris Coursey  
Sonoma County Board of Supervisors Chair  
575 Administration Drive, Room 100A  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403