

President Obama, FCC Outline Next-Gen Broadband Promise for Schools and Libraries

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California Impact of ConnectED

All this national attention on the issue of broadband connectivity is music to the ears of Sunne Wright McPeak, the CEO of the California Emerging Technology Fund, a non-profit organization founded by the CPUC in 2006 dedicated to bridging the Digital Divide in California. She recently testified in Washington, D.C. before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet on broadband initiatives that the federal government should take in partnership with the States and local agencies and organizations.

“We applaud the national focus on the critical issue of helping all students thrive in the Digital Age, and nowhere is the need more urgent than in California’s poorest communities,” McPeak said. “Learning today takes place 24/7. It is pivotal that ConnectED and E-rate reforms recognize that broadband connectivity alone is not enough to increase academic achievement in California’s poorest neighborhoods, located mostly in urban centers and rural communities. In California, it is very clear that to reach the state’s goal of 80% adoption among California households by 2017 – which is necessary for the FCC to meet National Broadband Plan targets, we need continued bold leadership at the federal and state level to secure an affordable broadband lifeline rate program, coupled with robust digital literacy training.”

Over at the California Public Utilities Commission, Terrie Prosper, director of the News and Public Information Office, commented that, akin to the FCC’s review of its E-Rate program, the state agency who watches over broadband in California has initiated an Order Instituting Rulemaking as to the California Teleconnect Fund (CTF) in January of 2013. Begun in October 1996, the CTF program provides a 50% discount on select communications services including Internet service to schools, libraries, hospitals and other non-profit organizations.

According to Prosper, a Staff Proposal was issued last month for comment by the parties to the proceeding which will review the CTF goals, eligible entities who can apply for and receive the CTF discount on telecommunications and Internet services, services eligible for the CTF discount, conditions placed on providers of CTF services, and CTF’s budget, administration and internal controls. She said the CPUC is looking at the recent FCC’s E-Rate announcements and efforts underway by the California Department of Education and California State Library to see if there are additional actions the CPUC can take to help bring the benefits of advanced telecommunications services to qualifying schools, libraries, government and hospital district-owned health care facilities, community colleges, the California Telehealth Network, and community-based organizations in California.

