

California Says It Wants Digital Equity. Here's the Test.

Posted on 05/14/2026 @ 09:52 AM

California leaders often speak about equity, affordability, and expanding economic opportunity for underserved communities. Gov. Gavin Newsom has made “California for All” a defining message of his administration. But slogans are easy. The harder question is whether California is willing to hand working families the keys to the modern economy or leave them locked outside looking through the window.

Now comes a real-world test of whether those priorities translate into action.

That is why the California Public Utilities Commission should move quickly to approve the proposed combination of Charter Communications and Cox Communications no later than August 13.

The proposed merger would deliver substantial affordability commitments, digital inclusion investments, and consumer protections aimed directly at communities that too often remain stranded on the wrong side of the digital divide. In today's economy, broadband is no longer a luxury. It is infrastructure. It is the front door to education, employment, healthcare, banking, and civic life.

For Latino families in California, the digital divide is not theoretical. It is economic reality.

It affects whether students can complete assignments at home. Whether parents can apply for jobs online. Whether workers can gain new skills. Whether small businesses can compete. Whether families can access healthcare, government services, or emergency information.

And increasingly, the divide is not about whether broadband lines exist nearby. It is about whether working families can afford the price of admission.

Right now, too many families are standing outside the gates of the digital economy while opportunity moves on without them.

That is why Charter and Cox's recently announced settlements with the California Emerging Technology Fund and the California Public Advocates Office matter. The agreements would create a \$20-per-month, 100/20 megabits-per-second broadband option for qualifying low-income households with no contracts, no early termination fees, and pricing locked in for five years.

In a state where families already feel squeezed by housing costs, groceries, childcare, transportation, and utility bills, that is not symbolic. It is meaningful pocketbook

relief.

The agreements would also significantly expand eligibility for discounted broadband offerings, including for existing customers. That matters because many working-class families live in the narrow space between poverty and stability. They earn too much to qualify for traditional assistance programs but still struggle to absorb rising monthly costs.

The commitments go further. The agreements include investments in digital equity programs, workforce development, outreach to underserved communities, devices for low-income households, and free broadband for schools, libraries, and community centers.

There is even a first-of-its-kind commitment to help struggling households remain connected rather than simply cutting off service when finances become tight. That reflects a growing understanding that disconnecting a family from broadband today is not a minor inconvenience. It can lock them out of school, work, healthcare, and public life all at once.

That is why the proposal has generated support from a remarkably broad coalition of organizations and community leaders, including many groups working directly with underserved communities. They understand the stakes because they see the consequences of digital exclusion every day.

The CPUC has every responsibility to conduct a careful review. But reviews are not supposed to become permanent waiting rooms.

Now in its 11th month, the review process is approaching a critical deadline. The settlement agreements themselves warn that if the commission does not act by August 13, the transaction and its public-interest commitments could collapse.

If that happens, the communities most affected will not be wealthy ZIP codes with multiple providers and backup options. It will be the families already balancing monthly bills and deciding which necessities can wait.

That would mean jeopardizing affordable broadband options, digital equity investments, workforce training initiatives, and expanded connectivity efforts for communities that have already spent too long standing outside the door.

California's leaders often speak about inclusion and affordability. Here is a chance to make those words tangible. The CPUC should approve the Charter-Cox transaction before these commitments disappear and the door to economic opportunity closes on the very communities California says it wants to lift up.