

California's digital equity goals require more than rhetoric

Editor



(Illustration courtesy of Computers 2 Kids)

By Cheri Pierre, CEO of Computers 2 Kids

California has spent years talking about digital equity. But for organizations working on the ground, the challenge is not abstract policy. It is whether families actually have the tools, connectivity and support necessary to participate in modern life.

At Computers 2 Kids, we see the reality every day. Families trying to help children complete homework without reliable internet access. Parents unable to apply for jobs online. Students sharing devices across entire households. Workers locked out of economic opportunities because they lack connectivity or digital skills.

That is why the proposed merger between Charter Communications and Cox Communications deserves prompt approval from the California Public Utilities

Commission.

The transaction is not simply about broadband infrastructure. It is about whether California can move quickly to deliver meaningful affordability and digital inclusion benefits to the communities that need them most.

For more than two decades, Computers 2 Kids has worked to bridge the digital divide by providing refurbished computers, affordable internet access, workforce training and technical support to underserved Californians. We know firsthand that connectivity alone is not enough. Digital equity requires affordability, education, devices, training and long-term support systems.

The recently announced settlement agreements with the California Emerging Technology Fund and the California Public Advocates Office, or Cal Advocates, reflect that broader understanding of the challenge.

Most importantly, the agreements would create a \$20-per-month broadband option for qualifying low-income households with no contracts, no early termination fees and pricing locked in for five years. Many California families are struggling with rising costs, and that kind of long-term affordability matters.

The agreements also would significantly expand eligibility for discounted broadband offerings — including making them available to both new and existing customers. This is a critical benefit because many working families fall into the affordability gap where internet service exists, but because of changed circumstances, such as the temporary loss of employment, such connectivity is financially difficult to maintain month after month. Allowing existing customers to downgrade to lower-cost, more affordable plans protects against unforeseen events that cause them to fall behind in their service payments.

The settlements also include investments in digital equity programs; community outreach; devices for low-income households; workforce development; and support for schools, libraries and community centers. That comprehensive approach reflects the reality that digital inclusion is interconnected with education, workforce readiness and economic mobility.

Organizations such as Computers 2 Kids understand that digital exclusion compounds inequality. Students without home internet access fall behind academically. Adults

without digital literacy skills struggle to compete for modern jobs. Families without reliable connectivity face barriers accessing healthcare, government services and educational opportunities.

California leaders regularly say that closing these gaps is a statewide priority. The question now is whether regulators will allow practical solutions to move forward.

These benefits are not hypothetical promises detached from accountability. They are enforceable commitments that come at a moment when California urgently needs scalable solutions that can deliver measurable results quickly.

The stakes are especially high because failure to approve the transaction by Aug. 13 could jeopardize the merger, as well as all of the public interest commitments attached to it.

That would be an unforced error by the CPUC and a major setback for California families still waiting for meaningful progress on affordability and digital equity.

At Computers 2 Kids, our mission is rooted in a simple belief: Everyone deserves the opportunity to fully participate in the digital world. Achieving that goal requires partnerships, investment and policies that prioritize outcomes over delay.

The CPUC now has an opportunity to advance exactly those goals, and it should act quickly to approve the Charter-Cox transaction and ensure these benefits reach California communities now.

For more information about Times of San Diego's advertising and sponsorship policies, [click here](#).