

## PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

505 VAN NESS AVENUE  
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3298



April 24, 2020  
Via E-Mail

SUBJECT: Affordable Broadband Plans to Support Customers Affected by the COVID-19 State of Emergency

TO: Internet Services Providers (ISPs) in California —

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated the “Digital Divide.” It is no longer just an inequity or inconvenience, it is a matter of public safety, public health and economic resilience as families without access are not benefitting from telework, telehealth, and telelearning opportunities. Millions of California students are transitioning to distance learning. Millions of newly unemployed Californians can no longer afford basic necessities, such as in-home broadband.

It is clear that not every household could or can continue to afford \$50 a month for a quality, high-speed Internet connection. Too many families have and continue to make the conscientious decision to forgo this necessity. As many others have in recent days, including [Attorney General Xavier Becerra](#) and [Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond](#), I write to you today to request additional support for these Californians. All providers must support their communities by offering a truly affordable option.

Many of you have stepped up, and are providing months of free service for those impacted by COVID-19, adopting new affordable plans, or enhancing existing affordable broadband plans. For this, I applaud you.

We must do more. Many affordable broadband plans are not meeting the needs of Californians impacted by this pandemic. Enrolling in affordable plans is now particularly challenging with schools and social service agency offices closed. Moreover, eligibility requirements and signup processes vary greatly between providers. I ask that you take a moment to reflect on whether your service is truly affordable. Can a family of four that was already living in or newly entering poverty afford your service? Does the service they can afford meet the needs of everyone in their household? Is signing up for your affordable offer as easy as possible?

We must ensure that everyone – at all times, and especially during this pandemic – is connected. Economic standing must never be a barrier to access to the essential service you provide. To this end, I ask that you evaluate your service offerings to ensure they are affordable, sufficient, and accessible. The [Partnership for Los Angeles Schools](#) and the [California Emerging Technologies Fund](#) have each provided detailed guidance on removing these barriers. Of general concern:

- **Provide service sufficient for all family members to work and learn from home:** Subscription in the range of \$0-15 a month, offering a minimum of 25 Mbps, and eliminate or waive data caps and overage charges.
- **Provide expansive program eligibility:** Eligibility must be as broad as possible, whether based on income, and/or qualifying for programs such as National School Lunch Program, Unemployment Insurance, Medi-Cal, CalFresh, California Alternative Rates for Energy, Family Electric Rate Assistance, or California LifeLine program. Consider allowing participation in any public assistance program in your program eligibility requirements.
- **Make signing up easy:** Allow customers to immediately sign-up for the plan online or over the phone before requiring eligibility verification. Eligibility can be verified at a later date.
- **Remove barriers:** Eliminate any requirement that customers have no unpaid balances. Supply new customers with a low or no cost modem and Wi-Fi router either to own or lease.

We understand that providing the highest quality affordable service possible may present a burden, especially for smaller companies. To offset these costs, we encourage all companies to offer [federal Broadband Lifeline service](#). We are also [investigating](#) whether the California LifeLine Program should subsidize broadband for low-income Californians.

Thank you for all you are doing for Californians at this difficult time. I wish the best for you, your families, and your employees and look forward to our continuing dialogue. Contact information for Communications Division Director Robert Osborn and his policy advisor Michael Minkus is below.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marybel Batjer". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned over a faint, light-colored grid background.

Marybel Batjer, President  
California Public Utilities Commission

Contacts

[Robert.Osborn@cpuc.ca.gov](mailto:Robert.Osborn@cpuc.ca.gov)

[Michael.Minkus@cpuc.ca.gov](mailto:Michael.Minkus@cpuc.ca.gov)

CC: Commissioner Liane Randolph, CPUC  
Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves, CPUC  
Commissioner Clifford Rechtschaffen, CPUC  
Commissioner Genevieve Shiroma, CPUC  
Alice Stebbins, Executive Director, CPUC  
Maryam Ebke, Deputy Executive Director, CPUC  
Lucian Filler, Deputy Executive Director, CPUC  
Edward Randolph, Deputy Executive Director, CPUC  
Robert Osborn, Communications Division Director, CPUC  
Hazel Miranda, Office of Government Affairs Director, CPUC