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Los Angeles, CA

Project of the Tides Center



ENSURING YOUTH BENEFIT FROM CALIFORNIA'S DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND VIDEO COMPETITION ACT OF 2006 (AB 2987)

Recommendations from The Children's Partnership

June 2006

1351 3rd Street Promenade
Suite 206
Santa Monica, CA 90401
Tel: 310-260-1220
Fax: 310-260-1921

2000 P Street, NW
Suite 330
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: 202-429-0033
Fax: 202-429-0974

frontdoor@childrenspartnership.org
http://www.childrenspartnership.org

The Children's Partnership (TCP) welcomes efforts that increase competition in the video and cable industry and that help speed up the build-out of high-speed Internet (or broadband). AB 2987 (Nunez and Levine), a bill now moving through the California Legislature, is one such effort.

This bill represents an important opportunity to accelerate the deployment of broadband and its many benefits to California communities and the nearly 10 million children and youth who live in them. In addition to delivering video programming, broadband is the conduit that delivers valuable opportunities to children, including services that increase their educational achievement, improve their health, enhance their job skills, and enable young people to get involved in their local communities. (See TCP's new report *Helping Our Children Succeed: What's Broadband Got to Do With It?* at <http://www.techpolicybank.org/TPB/Research/Brief/Broadband>)

However, there is a serious risk that these benefits will bypass many children, especially those living in low-income communities. This bill leaves open the possibility that video providers will pick and choose the locations as well as the quality of the broadband infrastructure they build in ways that could further disadvantage children in low-income communities.

To ensure that youth benefit from the policies in AB 2987, TCP has made three recommendations that, taken together, will help assure that all children can receive broadband's benefits. These recommendations were developed in collaboration with and building upon the efforts of many of the organizations we work with, including the California Community Technology Policy Group (CCTPG), Latino Issues Forum, Media Alliance, and Angelenos for Equitable Access to Technology (AEA2T).

Recommendations to Ensure that All Children Benefit from Broadband

The Children's Partnership's public-private approach includes three provisions:

1. **Build-Out Requirements.** For youth to receive broadband-enabled benefits, the fiber must be present in their communities. Enacted policy should include build-out requirements that result in low-income communities receiving comparable-quality broadband services as other communities. The current language of AB 2987 allows providers to choose which communities and neighborhoods they wish to serve and with what level of service. Without language to assure timely build-out, low-income communities may be bypassed or receive vastly inferior service. Other states, such as New Jersey, have passed laws establishing timelines for the build-out of broadband. California should provide similar, strong protections against the inequitable delivery of service.

2. *Affordable Connections.* Community technology programs (CTPs), youth centers, clinics, libraries, schools, and other community-based organizations where children spend their time rely on high-speed Internet to deliver educational, health, and economic opportunities to children. These organizations serving low-income communities should be connected to broadband at affordable rates—reduced or free, as appropriate. By connecting these facilities, users can experience the added value of broadband service, which is likely to increase the take-up rate of the service.
3. *Training.* Training and assistance in the effective and appropriate use of these new information technologies ought to be available to youth and their parents to help them get the maximum benefit from broadband-enabled opportunities. For example, while many academic curricula exist online, studies have shown that students' grades are more likely to improve when instructors are present to assist students. Similarly, parents need training and support to guide their children in positive uses of high-speed Internet and help their children avoid the risks inherent in the online world.

California's Digital Divide Fund should be built up so it can support the training and other activities that bridge the digital opportunity gap. Existing funding mechanisms should provide the necessary funding. These include: a portion of revenues collected from franchise fees; a portion of the fines assessed on telephone or cable companies or settlement agreements; revenues from leases to house cell towers on government property; and universal service fees.

For further information, contact James Lau at jlau@childrenspartnership.org or (310) 260-1220.