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AB 1560, Bill to Close the Digital Divide for K-12 Students Passes in Privacy & Consumer Protection Committee

AB 1560 will provide students access to free or low-cost Internet service for distance learning

Sacramento, CA— Introduced by Assemblymember Tom Daly and the [California Cable & Telecommunications Association \(CCTA\)](#), AB 1560, which will provide an immediate pathway to connect more low-income K-12 students with free or low-cost Internet services in their homes without receiving a bill or facing eligibility hurdles to sign up for service, passed today through the Privacy & Consumer Protection Committee.

The bill will allow the state to negotiate and pay for bulk rate residential broadband service, on behalf of local school districts, for the purpose of providing more K-12 students with free or low-cost Internet services essential for remote and distance learning. These “sponsored service agreements” are a proven model for getting eligible students connected quickly without each school district incurring the burden, expense and delay of entering into an individual contract.

“The pandemic has underscored the disadvantages and learning loss that students face when they do not have Internet access in their homes,” **said Assemblymember Tom Daly**. “Even after our students return to their classrooms, Internet access will continue to play an important role in everyday life and ensuring equal access to education and employment opportunities. Therefore, we must continue to make it our collective mission to bring all Californians online.”

Under AB 1560, the Department of Technology will pre-qualify service providers for Sponsored Service Agreements, so students get the level of Internet service they need for distance learning. Individual school districts can opt in and then follow a streamlined process for eligible student households to start service. The families will not be billed, and student privacy will be protected.

To further address distance learning needs, the bill will require the Office of the State Superintendent to set minimum standards for student computing devices and report on the number of K-12 students without access to broadband service or an adequate computing device, providing a more accurate picture of ongoing challenges that need to be addressed.

In addition, the bill will require the Office of the State Superintendent to make the public and local school districts aware of the availability of broadband service providers’ low-cost Internet service plans, creating more opportunities for households to find the easiest and most affordable ways to connect students to online learning.

According to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), [more than 96% of Californians](#) have access to high-speed, reliable broadband technology, however studies still estimate that roughly 20% of K-12 students lack either broadband Internet access or a functional computing device to connect online from home, making it nearly impossible to participate in online learning curriculum and classes.

California's cable industry has provided discounted in-home access to millions of K-12 students for years, but many qualifying Californians have yet to subscribe to these services. With years of experience in getting K-12 low-income households connected, the cable and broadband industry has learned the best way to sign up these families is through partnerships with the local school districts, in which the school districts are provided with blanket eligibility waivers to increase the student body population capable of receiving these services.

"AB 1560 provides the framework for immediately getting low-income K-12 students and their families connected to the Internet to participate in remote and distance learning," **said Carolyn McIntyre, President of the California Cable & Telecommunications Association (CCTA).** "By focusing on removing barriers to Internet adoption, AB 1560 would do more in the near term to close the digital divide and provide equal access to online education tools for K-12 students than any other proposed policy solution."

This bill represents years of shared knowledge, experience and learned best practices from the cable and broadband industry who have a keen understanding of the complexities and nuances needed to close the digital divide. Proposed policies looking to close the digital divide for K-12 students that focus on building new broadband networks would not provide any direct benefit for at least five years. AB 1560 will help remove barriers to broadband adoption and provide more K-12 students with immediate access to equal learning, employment, social and health opportunities they need to keep pace in today's world.

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About the California Cable & Telecommunications Association:

The California Cable & Telecommunications Association (CCTA) is the industry's largest state cable and telecommunications association. CCTA is a leader in the development of video, broadband and communications policy in California, and represents the industry before the California State Legislature, state regulatory agencies and the state and federal courts.