



June 29, 2021

The Honorable Bill Dodd
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 4032
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Senate Bill 556 (Dodd): California Connectivity Act

Dear Senator Dodd,

I am writing on behalf of the West Health Institute, a San Diego-based 501(c)(3) medical research organization that conducts applied medical research to advance our mission of lowering the cost of healthcare and enabling seniors to successfully age in place with access to high-quality, affordable health and support services that preserve and protect their dignity, quality of life and independence. West Health Institute is part of the larger West Health family of nonprofit nonpartisan organizations, which also includes the Gary and Mary West Foundation and West Health Policy Center.

West Health Institute is proud to support Senate Bill 556, the California Connectivity Act, which will bring California into accordance with existing federal and state laws seeking to accelerate the implementation of broadband infrastructure. SB 556 would close the digital divide for Californians living in rural and low-income communities – particularly for seniors in these areas. Although the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted regulations addressing these barriers, many cities in California continue to ignore or delay implementing the FCC's regulations.

As we experienced this past year, expanding access to broadband is essential to reducing social isolation and to enabling access to telehealth for seniors in these communities. Demand for reliable, high-speed broadband connectivity has been growing over the decades, however COVID-19 has made it abundantly clear that closing the digital divide is an absolute necessity for health and well-being – especially for older adults. Seniors without access to broadband during the pandemic were at an extreme disadvantage, often experiencing worse health outcomes compounded by social isolation and lack of support services.

We thank you for your leadership on this important issue, and if enacted we are confident SB 556 would provide better connectivity, improve access to health services, and ultimately leave all Californians better prepared for the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Zia Agha", written over a light blue circular background.

Zia Agha, MD
Chief Medical Officer,
West Health Institute

