

Draft Letter for LIOB Consideration – December 05, 2018: Essential – Relevant - Doable

Name of IOU Executive
Company Name
Title of IOU Executive
Address
City, California Zip Code

Dear:

The Low Income Oversight Board (LIOB) for the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) encourages you to implement broadband outreach and adoption programs to assist your CARE customers with obtaining affordable, highspeed internet access (broadband).

According to the 2017 IGS Berkeley Broadband Adoption Survey 30% of Californians lack meaningful Internet access at home, and a sobering 38.6 of households earning \$40,000 or less annually lack meaningful Internet access at home. The LIOB views broadband adoption by low-income household as essential because high-speed Internet access is a 21st Century necessity for energy savings.

We know IOUs increasingly rely on high-speed Internet home service to communicate with, bill, and provide information about energy efficiencies and savings to your customers. Getting low-income customers online is imperative to your ability to offer comparable products and services to all your customers. In addition, it will save money in operations and reduce your carbon footprint. A July 2014 *GovTech* interview speaks to the potential savings, “The standard American home offers a handful of obvious targets for smarter energy use. I should have a thermostat that just knows about those critical peak days and knows to turn off my air conditioner at those hours”, said Lucas Davis, an associate professor at Haas School of Business at UC Berkeley. “I should have a clothes washer and a dryer that can time running for low price periods.”

Home broadband service is a necessity to achieve the energy savings promised by smart thermostats, smart grids, and smart appliances. It is clear from the CPUC’s web site that they are counting the smart grid to provide the next level of energy efficiency and savings.

In addition to the inability to access the energy savings of smart meters, those households without broadband and Internet access also lack the ability to manage their account and pay bills online. This forces the utility take the small but unnecessarily step of paper billing which incurs printing and mailing costs. Utilities are also unable to communicate with their low-income customers in the same manner as their wealthier, connected customers. The pose hardships to both the customer and the utility as low-income customers won’t be able to receive near instantaneous emergency alerts, and energy alert warnings.

There is clearly a crossover between those who lack meaningful internet access and your CARE customers. We are impressed with the results CETF has obtained from its projects with San Diego Gas and Electric and the Sacramento Municipal Utility District. We believe your utility can and should serve as a trusted messenger to outreach to CARE households. The LIOB encourages you to build upon the prior projects and conduct outreach efforts in your service area to assist your CARE customers with obtaining affordable broadband service. We would like to see you work in collaboration with knowledgeable CBOs such as the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) to discuss the planning and design of your projects.

The LIOB will be asking the IOUs to report regularly about the progress you are making in getting all low-income households online. Thus, we urge you to move forward to develop and launch a project in the near future to reach your low-income households to get them online and part of the digital customers contributing to greater energy efficiency in California.

Sincerely,

LIOB Chairman [and perhaps all LIOB Members]

Low Income Oversight Board