

Date of Hearing: April 10, 2019

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND CONVEYANCE
Miguel Santiago, Chair
AB 488 (Aguiar-Curry) – As Introduced February 12, 2019

SUBJECT: California Broadband Council

SUMMARY: Adds the Secretary of Food and Agriculture, or the secretary's designee, to the California Broadband Council to promote broadband deployment and adoption; and makes additional findings and declarations.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Broadband Council for the purpose of promoting broadband deployment in unserved and underserved areas of the state, and broadband adoption throughout the state for the benefit of all Californians. (Government Code (GOV) Section 8885)
- 2) Specifies that the membership of the California Broadband Council includes all of the following:
 - a) The Director of Technology, or his or her designee;
 - b) The President of the Public Utilities Commission, or his or her designee;
 - c) The Director of Emergency Services, or his or her designee;
 - d) The Superintendent of Public Instruction, or his or her designee;
 - e) The Director of General Services, or his or her designee;
 - f) The Secretary of Transportation, or his or her designee;
 - g) The President of the California Emerging Technology Fund, or his or her designee;
 - h) A member of the Senate, appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules; and,
 - i) A member of the Assembly, appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly. (GOV Section 8886)
- 3) Specifies that the duties of the California Broadband Council shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following:
 - a) Ensuring communication among state agencies regarding California's participation in proceedings related to the National Broadband Plan released by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC);

- b) Ensuring that state agencies share all relevant information in order to maximize California's opportunities for federal and private funding for broadband deployment and adoption;
- c) Ensuring that all relevant state agencies are made aware of actions necessary to fully implement recommendations in the 2008 Broadband Task Force Report;
- d) Identifying opportunities for state agencies and state broadband networks to share facilities, rights-of-way, or other resources related to broadband deployment and adoption; and,
- e) Taking any other actions to ensure that state agencies are coordinating efforts and resources to promote broadband deployment and adoption. (GOV Section 8887)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill has been keyed fiscal by the Legislative Counsel.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Authors Statement:** According to the author, "A lack of reliable broadband service prevents farmers from using 21st century technologies and real-time data to make agricultural production more efficient and environmentally sustainable. AB 488 ensures the unique needs of farmers are considered when state leaders develop strategies to expand broadband access in California by creating a new seat on the California Broadband Council for the Secretary of Food and Agriculture."
- 2) **Background:** The 'Digital Divide' generally refers to the gap that exist between demographics and regions of the State that have access to affordable and reliable broadband. For many, broadband has become a necessity as many Americans go online for work, education, entertainment, healthcare, and much more. According to a PPIC report, in 2017, 90 percent of California households used the internet and 74 percent had broadband subscriptions at home – up from 82 percent and 70 percent in 2013. Though internet usage and broadband access are at an all-time high, the digital divide still persist across major demographic groups and regions throughout the State, especially among low-income, less educated, and rural households.

Whereas many Californians in densely populated mostly urban areas of the State have fast and reliable broadband options, broadband availability has not kept pace with the growing in rural areas. The PPIC report found that only 59 percent of households in rural areas had broadband at home. The lack of reliable broadband services in rural areas prevent those Californians from reaping the full benefits of broadband services compared to their counterparts in more urban areas.

- 3) **Rural Broadband Investments:** As more of our economy move towards using technology to increase productivity, rural areas continue to face substantial challenges in deploying reliable broadband services. A lack of reliable broadband services can have a dramatic impact on farmers and their ability to produce enough food to support a growing population especially in the face of growing competition and climate change. Many farmers are beginning to use new technologies that can provide real time data that can greatly improve agricultural production. These technologies include farm management software, precision

agriculture, sensors, smart irrigation, drones, among others. The ability to utilize these technologies relies heavily on a broadband network that can support such demands. The availability of broadband in such areas can also have a positive impact on the surrounding communities, including increased educational and employment opportunities. Furthermore, as the State continues to see more wildfires and natural disasters, the need for reliable broadband in fairgrounds is critical for public safety personnel in order to operate a reliable and redundant communications network to support emergency response efforts.

Recognizing the need for more broadband investments in rural areas, in recent years, the FCC is seeking to distribute up to \$1.98 billion through its Connect American Funds Phase II reverse auction to expand broadband to more than 700,000 rural locations in the United States. In addition, the US Department of Agriculture recently announced plans to offer up to \$600 million in loans and grants through a pilot program to expand broadband infrastructure in rural areas of the country. In California, AB 1665 (E. Garcia) Chapter 851, Statute of 2017, included an additional \$330 million for the California Advanced Services Fund to help deploy broadband infrastructure and increase adoption in unserved areas of the State.

- 4) **California Broadband Council:** The California Broadband Council was established pursuant to SB 1462 (Padilla) Chapter 338, Statutes of 2010, to promote broadband deployment in unserved and underserved areas of the state. The Council is made up of nine members representing key state organizations and legislators, with the goal of identify state resources, encouraging public and private partnership, and recommending policy and legislation to help expand high-speed broadband throughout the state.

This bill would add the Secretary of Food and Agriculture, or the secretary's designee, to the California Broadband Council. Given the needs of rural and agricultural communities, success in providing reliable broadband service will require input and cooperation from many different entities including those specialized in the unique challenges facing these communities.

- 5) **Arguments in Support:** According to the California Farm Bureau Federation, "As California's urban communities, specifically, have benefitted from the deployment and utilization of high-speed/broadband technology, the benefit of broadband speed connectivity for rural California and agriculture operations has not been fully realized. Agricultural technology, or Ag-Tech, is the future of farming and is rapidly expanding. Broadband enabled farm management software, e-commerce platforms, precision agriculture, sensors, smart irrigation, drones and robotics will greatly increase efficiencies on California's farms. Yet the adoption and application of this technology relies on the availability of broadband networks. AB 488 ensures that the California agriculture will have a dedicated representative when developing strategies to expand broadband connectivity."
- 6) **Prior Legislation:** AB 1665 (E. Garcia) of 2017 provided an additional \$330 million to the California Advanced Services Fund to increase broadband deployment and adoption in unserved areas of the State. *Status: Chaptered by the Secretary of State – Chapter 851, Statutes of 2017.*

SB 1462 (Padilla) of 2010 established the California Broadband Council to promote broadband deployment and adoption throughout the state. *Status: Chaptered by the Secretary of State – Chapter 338, Statutes of 2010.*

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Farm Bureau Federation
Community Alliance with Family Farmers
Valley Vision

Opposition

None on file.

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