Newsom Signs SB 378, Bill Aims to Close California's Digital Divide, Expand Internet Access for All

SB 378 (Gonzalez) will help fast-track the deployment of broadband in California by streamlining local approval processes and establishing best practices surrounding internet infrastructure projects.

Sacramento, CA – This afternoon, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed SB 378 (Sen. Lena Gonzalez) that will help expand internet access for communities across California. The bill encourages local jurisdictions to use the industry best practice of microtrenching, an innovative and efficient technology used for installing broadband fiber lines underground.

Right now, millions of Californians lack access to basic high-speed internet, stifling economic growth and disenfranchising low-income and rural communities. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Californians have transitioned to an economy that is dependent on remote work and an education system that revolves around virtual learning.

"The COVID-19 pandemic shined a bright light on California's severe digital divide that has left too many of our children behind. Every Californian deserves access to affordable, high-speed internet," said California Emerging Technology Fund President and CEO Sunne Wright McPeak. "We commend Senator Lena Gonzalez for her leadership and applaud the Governor for signing this bill to authorize vital tools in helping expand internet access to our most vulnerable communities," she continued.

"SB 378 is a vital step to closing California's digital divide," said Senator Lena Gonzalez (D-Long Beach). "The bill will help more Californians access high-speed internet, improving access to telehealth, education, and economic opportunities. I am thankful to Governor Newsom for singing this important bill into law."

SB 378 will help close the digital divide by speeding up the process for deploying high-speed internet. Microtrenching technology cuts a two-inch wide and roughly 20-inch-deep trench to lay the fiber underground while simultaneously backfilling and sealing. The entire process takes hours and cars can drive on the road the same day. Microtrenching is typically 80% quicker than traditional open-trench street excavations, as well as being less disruptive to the urban environment. Microtrenching complies with all utility safety rules and goes further by using ground penetrating radar prior to installation.

The bill received widespread support including endorsements from the Little Hoover Commission, California School Boards Association, the California Medical Association, the Bay Area Council, Greater Sacramento Economic Council, Los Angeles County Business Federation, and dozens of other advocacy groups demanding public policy solutions to close the state's digital divide.