



April 11, 2018

The Honorable Scott D. Wiener
Senator, 11th Senate District
State Capitol, Room 5100
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for SB 822 (Wiener) – California Net Neutrality Act

Dear Senator Wiener,

I'm writing you as the Senior Campaign Director for Color Of Change, the nation's largest online racial justice organization with over one million members, in support of Senate Bill 822.

Net neutrality is the popular principle that all websites and other online content should be equally available to consumers at the internet speed provided for in their agreement with an Internet Service Provider (ISP). Under net neutrality, ISPs are not allowed to charge "access fees" to sites and services simply to load for users, create fast and slow lanes that advantage deep-pocketed incumbents and ISPs' own content, nor block legal content that ISPs disagree with. This principle has helped California become the nation's leading tech hub, employing more workers, over one million, in the tech industry than any other state. Because of net neutrality, companies like Google, Facebook, and Uber have become economic giants - each employing thousands of Californians. And because of net neutrality, Black-owned startups like ACT-1 Group and Agbara Life have flourished. In particular, businesses owned by Black women have seen tremendous growth thanks to the open Internet.¹

Unfortunately, on December 14, 2017, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) repealed the federal net neutrality rules, adopted under President Obama. These rules were extremely popular with Californians with 700,000 of them submitting comments to stop the repeal. The support for net neutrality is strongly bipartisan with 83% of voters supporting it, including 75% of Republicans and 89% of Democrats.² The Obama era net neutrality rules offered strong protections for California's tech companies. Prior to FCC net neutrality rules, the largest ISPs (Comcast, Verizon, AT&T), were regularly slowing down traffic to popular websites.³ For instance, in 2014, Comcast slowed down traffic to the popular, California-based, streaming site, Netflix, and used that to extort a new deal from Netflix.⁴ Without strong net neutrality principles, California companies will again be at risk for this type of exploitative business practices.

¹ <http://fortune.com/2015/06/29/black-women-entrepreneurs/>

²

<http://thehill.com/policy/technology/364528-poll-83-percent-of-voters-support-keeping-fccs-net-neutrality-rules>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jun/22/major-internet-providers-slowing-traffic-speeds>

⁴ <https://consumerist.com/2014/02/23/netflix-agrees-to-pay-comcast-to-end-slowdown/>



Net neutrality is not just critical for California's tech economy but for everyone in the state. Californians lack adequate competition in broadband service with over 80 percent of Californians stuck with a choice of just one or two residential service providers. Without net neutrality, ISPs can freely engage in the kinds of uncompetitive practices that further the digital divide in California. And the digital divide is still stark with 81% of white households in California having access to broadband and just 71% of Black, and 52% of Latinx households having access.⁵ Without strong net neutrality protections, ISPs will be able to create a tiered Internet, where low-income, rural and minority communities, schools and businesses will be priced out.

An open Internet has been a crucial place for artists, entrepreneurs, and activists to envision a new world and lead us into the future. Net neutrality allows free thinkers like these to create without boundaries, without fear that their work will be shutdown by an ISP that either wants more money or simply doesn't agree with the content they are creating. With the open internet, everyone from amateur comedians on YouTube, to celebrities, to huge media companies play by the same rules.

With net neutrality, Issa Rae was eventually able to turn her popular web series "The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl" in to the hit HBO comedy series "Insecure," because her ability to develop her own unique content was never interfered with by an ISP. Net neutrality is crucial to the careers of comedians, musicians, artists and other creators like Ms. Rae, but it also allows serious content to find an audience without the endorsement or approval of traditional media gatekeepers. For so many Black Californian families impacted by police brutality or immigrant families whose loved ones are taken by ICE, the open Internet is the only way to get their stories out to the world. Without the open Internet, the world might never have learned what happened to Stephon Clark or Oscar Grant.

The open internet has empowered communities of color to organize throughout California for civil rights, racial justice, immigrant rights and call out misrepresentation in the media. SB 822 will help keep the Internet open for those who want to speak up, mobilize, and demand change.

For trailblazing new artists, technologies, businesses, and activists to thrive in California, net neutrality is crucial. Without the protections of SB 822, ISPs will be free to engage in practices that are inconsistent with a free and fair Internet and the values California strives for. To keep California's economy growing, people connected, and provide a platform for marginalized voices to be heard, we need SB 822.

Color of Change wholeheartedly supports SB 822.

Sincerely,

⁵ <http://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-digital-divide/>



Brandi Collins-Dexter
Senior Campaign Director
Color Of Change

CC: Members of the Senate Energy, Utilities and Communications Committee
Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee