

San Diego City Council

05/12/2020

*Prepared Testimony regarding Connectivity*

Good morning Committee Chair Bry and city councilmembers,

My name is Chelsey Birgisdottir. I am a policy associate with the ACLU of San Diego & Imperial Counties.

In the midst of this pandemic, it is more important than ever for people in our city to stay connected, informed and have access to lifesaving and life-sustaining resources. I ask you to ensure equitable access to this information by providing free broadband internet and the necessary devices to San Diegans unable to obtain these vital resources.

Broadband internet access is essential to staying informed and updated on public health measures; on the education of our children and the ability to work from home; for accessing unemployment forms and information; and for staying connected to friends and family, including loved ones who may be incarcerated.

According to a 2017 [American Community Survey](#), 56 percent of low-income households with school-aged children in California have broadband subscriptions, compared to 75 percent of all households with school-aged children. Lack of access to technology and the infrastructure that supports it denies low-income communities and communities of color the resources, opportunities and information that a stable and strong internet connection provides.

We need city council to provide free or low-cost internet service to households in-need and free public internet hot spots. These options should not require annual contracts nor should they exclude people from access for any reason.

Funds should also be appropriated to provide devices to support internet connectivity such as computers, tablets and/or phones.

Finally, city council should ensure that connectivity services, resources and devices do not collect, store or distribute user data. All should have protections for user privacy and free speech rights and ensure that providers are transparent about the terms and duration of internet service contracts.

We cannot leave San Diegans disconnected, especially during a pandemic. We look to you to take action on this critical issue.

Thank you for your time.