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September 21, 2021

Honorable Members of the Oakland City Council
Oakland City Hall
1 Frank Ogawa Plaza
Oakland CA 94612

Community Letter of Support for the Oakland Internet Choice Ordinance

As the COVID 19 pandemic forced Oakland residents to work from home while stuck in their apartments, the need for affordable internet access has never been more crucial to maintaining our health and our connection to the outside world.

The ongoing crisis has already caused thousands of Bay Area workers to lose their jobs. While there are patchworks of relief expected for people unable to work and out of a job, thousands will still pay more money than they can afford for the internet because of their landlords' insistence on inflating the prices of their tenants' Internet Service Provider (ISP) in their buildings.

This practice has always been terrible for Oaklanders, especially low-income people and people of color who live in long-redlined neighborhoods where their choice of ISP has long been smaller than those of more affluent Oaklanders. Oakland's historically redlined neighborhoods do not only suffer from a historic lack of investment by lenders, but also from a lack of investment by broadband providers.

As a result, there are significant racial disparities in broadband service quality and adoption rates in Oakland neighborhoods with high numbers of households of color inadequately connected. Oakland's landlords are perpetuating redlining by preventing low-income tenants and tenants of color from accessing the high-speed broadband services which are critical to recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and to success in today's economy.

At a time of global crisis when access to telework, reliable health information, and the ability to meaningfully connect to our families, neighbors, and friends at broadband speeds has never been more urgent, the present situation of landlord-ISP payola cannot continue. Oaklanders cannot see their savings dwindle to overpay for internet access.

Now is the time to eliminate the unjust practice of landlord-ISP payola. We ask for Oakland to adopt Internet Choice legislation, which has successfully eliminated this practice across the Bay. It has given tens of thousands of San Franciscans better and more affordable access to the internet since it was passed in 2016. Oakland cannot wait to do the same.

Council member Noel Gallo is offering this important legislation and we support his effort and ask you to do so as well. The ordinance ensures that Oakland tenants are not paying more for Internet access than they should, and that residents may choose the best available provider based on affordability and reliability, as market competition is supposed to allow.

For more on this issue and clear evidence of Oakland landlords extracting extra money from their tenants by limiting their ISP choices, see the SF Examiner op-ed, [“San Francisco’s Communications Choice Ordinance is Working.”](#)

Internet Choice legislation will open up denser residential markets to alternative providers who can provide increased choice and affordability for Oaklanders. Without payola agreements, providers can meaningfully expand their services across Oakland in an economically feasible way and replenish market competition in neighborhoods long missing it. This is why several alternative Internet Service Providers have joined in coalition with long-time Internet freedom groups to support this proposed legislation, which provides a path for residential complexes with 4 units or more to be open-access for the best available Internet products.

As the State of California is poised for greatly increased investment in fiber buildout, it is crucial that the new options these resources will make available are to all Oaklanders, regardless of where they live. It is time to challenge duopoly and champion choice.

Signed,

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