



Community Union, Inc.

RE: SB556 Oppose, Response to “streamlining” bill

My name is Larry Ortega. I am one of this country’s foremost authorities on solving the digital divide. Since 1993, through my leadership - tens of thousands of low-income families have successfully embraced Internet adoption. Over 30 million people have been touched by the successes of our work, Community Union’s broadband training programs, via our media partners presentation during their newscasts. Key to our success has been maximizing existing resources – schools’ and libraries’ computer labs – for the benefit of the local communities. Not one entity has done more than our group to bring a robust, multi-lingual curriculum for training and adoption of the Internet to the people, in their neighborhood. We have provided training and adoption programs in Spanish, Korean, Chinese, English, and Burmese.

One of my favorite country western movies is Tombstone, starring Kurt Russell and Val Kilmer. The bar scenes where the drunkard cowboys make incredibly unreasonable demands from the people around them is much like these so-called “streamline” bills introduced by our California legislators. But in this instance, our legislators are not drunk on alcohol. Rather, they most likely are drunk on money. A flood of money that is gushing in from the telecommunications industry’s biggest players. Nonsensical proposals (bills), seemingly without much thought at all - much like a drunkard cowboy would do - declaring to the world “streamlining” is the key, continue to make their way on to the floors of both the Assembly and Senate in California. The problem, there is absolutely no empirical evidence or otherwise formal research to support this notion. This then triggers activist like myself and others to write letters like these, pointing-out the obvious; to which may or may not be fully comprehended given the state our legislators are in relative to this fictional saloon we call our legislature.

Example DIVCA. On or about 2006, one telecommunication giant came to me and asked would I testify before the City Council in Los Angeles on their behalf relating to a bill (DIVCA), that would *streamline* deployment and work to close the digital divide. Then L.A. City Councilman, Tony Cardenas, *ate my lunch* relative to the testimony I provided. He cited as I just stated, there was no evidence that taking powers away from the municipalities would in fact work to make deployment complete and access to the Internet affordable. As we found (15 years later) through this latest Covid pandemic, nearly 40% of children throughout California could not connect to high-speed Internet because it simply was just...not...available...

So how did the streamlining(DIVCA) work-out for us Californians? [We pay three times as much<sup>1</sup>](#) for service as our counter-parts in Europe, Asia and Israel. Even after the deployment in selected areas by the telecommunication industry, affordability continues to be the primary barrier for most living in the digital divide and thus has made *streamlining* a 0(zero) impact option, or benefit to Californians.

We, Community Union and the tens of thousands of families we have helped, strongly oppose SB556.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Ortega".

Larry Ortega  
Community Union, Inc.

1. Bruce Kushnick, January 29, 2021, *Is America’s ‘Triple Play’ Overcharged \$170.00+ Per Month Compared to Europe?*, Medium.com, April 14, 2021, {<https://kushnickbruce.medium.com/is-americas-triple-play-overcharged-170-00-per-month-compared-to-europe-3a1d2c594d0d>}