



January 23rd, 2026

California Public Utilities Commission  
505 Van Ness Avenue  
San Francisco, CA  
94102

**RE: Comments on Rulemaking R.24-06-012 – Carrier of Last Resort Modernization**

To the Commission,

On behalf of the Boards of Supervisors for Marin, Napa, Humboldt, and Sonoma Counties, we submit these comments to the California Public Utilities Commission’s ongoing rulemaking on the future of Carrier of Last Resort obligations, in support of the Staff Proposal for regulatory reform to address Carrier of Last Resort (COLR) matters. Our counties previously expressed opposition to AB 470 because it sought to resolve COLR policy questions through statute: in our view, a regulatory process is both a more appropriate forum and offers the opportunity for more granular reform than legislation. **The Commission’s current rulemaking confirms that those issues are best addressed through careful, evidence-based regulation. We strongly support the direction the Commission has taken with respect to verification of service and prioritization of affordability.**

**We also highlight three points where we seek modification of the proposal, related to unaddressed need for local transparency in mapped verifications, the automatic 15-year phase-out, and the need for additional clarity in the definitions of “modernized” and “equivalent service.”**

**Areas of Strong Support**

The Staff Proposal establishes a rigorous, address-level framework for evaluating COLR relief that reflects on-the-ground realities in both urban and rural communities. In particular, we support the Commission’s requirement that any replacement service demonstrate reliable, voice-grade performance inside the home, its recognition of the limits of modeled mobile data, and its rejection of reliance on generalized FCC coverage maps. These elements appropriately prioritize public safety, reliability, and equity over administrative convenience.

**Indoor Service Reliability**

The indoor service reliability standard is especially important to our counties. The Federal Communications Commission does not collect or publish indoor voice reliability data and mobile carriers are not required to certify indoor performance. Thus, the Commission’s approach correctly places the burden of proof on the COLR applicant. This ensures that COLR relief occurs only where equivalent service is demonstrably available, and that uncertainty does not result in loss of essential voice service for residents who rely on it during emergencies and extended power outages.



The proposed standards appropriately limit COLR relief in mixed-service and rural geographies. Even in urban areas where cable and fiber-based wireline voice service may exist—and where cable providers typically maintain the largest wireline service footprints within metropolitan areas—relief is not automatic and remains contingent on an affirmative demonstration of reliable indoor mobile voice service from independent providers. Outside of cable service areas, including much of West Marin, the rugged and mountainous terrain that comprises much of Napa, and similarly situated rural and coastal communities in Humboldt and Sonoma, the absence of any qualified wireline voice provider properly precludes COLR relief regardless of mobile coverage claims. This outcome aligns with our counties’ public safety responsibilities and reflects the realities of terrain, power reliability, and service availability.

### **Recognition of Limitations of Modeled Home Data**

Key to our counties’ support is staff’s proposal that “Significant Consumer Choice” require either two qualified providers, excluding the COLR, or one qualified provider and two facilities-based mobile providers. The Staff Proposal recognizes that mobile service is not a full substitute for a COLR and that mobile service is easily hindered by geographic or structural obstacles. The Proposal appropriately shifts the burden to COLRs to actually test the ubiquity and reliability of indoor coverage on a more granular basis during the withdrawal process. Additionally, we support the continued inclusion of affordability as a key criterion for significant consumer choice: a person’s access to potentially lifesaving communications at the onset of a disaster should not depend on their ability to pay.

### **Continued Need for Local Transparency**

The rulemaking highlights an important procedural issue that remains unresolved by the Staff Proposal and that our counties encourage the Commission to address as the process moves forward. COLR relief determinations are application-driven and address-specific, yet local governments lack advance access to location-level information identifying where legacy Plain Old Telephone Service service remains available. Without baseline visibility into existing voice service footprints, counties cannot meaningfully preplan for potential relief requests, assess emergency communications impacts, or respond efficiently within compressed review timelines. Access to location-level POTS availability, at least for planning and emergency preparedness purposes and subject to appropriate confidentiality protections, would materially improve local participation and outcomes. Relatedly, we seek full staff endorsement of High-Cost Fund reform to allow for the use of CHCF-B funds to ensure ongoing maintenance of advanced networks.

### **Removal of Automatic 15-Year Phaseout**

An additional point of emphasis we seek to the Staff Proposal is the removal of the automatic phase-out of COLR after 15 years to ensure the CPUC has sufficient latitude to examine the scale of short-term voluntary deployment of advanced networks. For residents at the ends of long, canyon roads, where voluntary deployment of advanced networks is likely to remain unprofitable, this automatic



phase-out kicks the can down the road and sets them up to be once again in peril of loss of basic means of communication.

**“Modernized” and “Equivalent Service” Need Additional Clarification in their Definitions**

Our counties support modernization of communications infrastructure where it results in equal or better service for residents. To achieve this, “equivalent service” must be defined in measurable, verifiable terms, not provider assertions or aggregate coverage claims.

In this context, the Staff Report’s use of the term “modernized” is potentially misleading, as it suggests system-level improvement and public benefit where none is defined or required. What is described as modernization is instead limited to carrier-specific technology substitution, not modernization of the communications ecosystem as a whole. From the public and governmental perspective, the system is already as “modern” as it will be under the current framework, with future changes driven by private technology choices rather than shared public-interest objectives such as resilience, interoperability, or emergency reliability.

The Commission’s rulemaking demonstrates that “modernization” and consumer protection are not mutually exclusive, and that COLR reform can proceed in a manner that safeguards public safety while allowing technological evolution.

We appreciate the Commission’s leadership in undertaking this complex work and urge continued reliance on the regulatory process rather than statutory intervention to resolve these issues. We also emphasize the need for continued consultation with counties on COLR policy and implementation and look forward to participating as the rulemaking proceeds.

Respectfully submitted,

Handwritten signature of Supervisor Eric Lucan in black ink.

Supervisor Eric Lucan  
President, Marin County Board of Supervisors

Handwritten signature of Supervisor Amber Manfree in blue ink.

Supervisor Amber Manfree  
Chair, Napa County Board of Supervisors

Handwritten signature of Supervisor Rebecca Hermosillo in blue ink.

Supervisor Rebecca Hermosillo  
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Handwritten signature of Supervisor Mike Wilson in blue ink.

Supervisor Mike Wilson  
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