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DIGITAL EQUITY ADVOCATES ISSUE JOINT PRESS STATEMENT CPUC Approves Charter-Cox Merger, Leaves Stronger Consumer Protections on the Table

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San Francisco, CA - August 13, 2026 - The California Alliance for Digital Equity (CADE), Digital Equity LA (DELA), Center for Accessible Technology (CforAT), Fresno Coalition for Digital Inclusion (FCDI), East Bay Broadband Consortium (EBBC), and Media Alliance are proud to have jointly contributed to the proceeding that took place at the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to determine if the merger between Charter Communications and Cox Communications was in the public interest. Historically, community voices like ours have been underrepresented in merger decision-making. Through collaboration, we were able to ensure that the perspectives of communities across the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and the Central Valley informed the CPUC's assessment of the proposed merger.

As part of the proceeding, our organizations offered a variety of recommendations to ensure public interest benefits would outweigh anticipated harms of the proposed merger. These recommendations focused on improving broadband affordability, strengthening disaster resilience & response, expanding workforce investments, and more. The scale of the merger made robust protections especially important, as the Public Advocates Office's analysis in the record showed that the post-merger company would be the *only* gigabit-capable provider for more than 2.6 million California locations.

At the conclusion of the proceeding, the CPUC had a choice between two decisions that would approve the merger: Commissioner Baker's Alternative Proposed Decision (APD) and a substantially more protective Proposed Decision (PD) from Administrative Law Judge Jamie Ormond, who oversaw the proceeding, developed the evidentiary record, and presided over the hearings. Unfortunately, today the Commission unanimously voted to approve the merger under the narrower APD, leaving many of PD's additional consumer protections on the table, including:

- No rental equipment charges for low-income plan customers;
- Longer-term California Lifeline participation and low-income price protections;
- Consistent promotional pricing across Charter's California footprint;
- A dedicated California customer hotline with multilingual human support;
- Dedicated live customer supporter for Californians with disabilities,
- Tribal service-quality reporting, mapping and a full-time Tribal liaison;
- Additional broadband deployment to 6,000 unserved and underserved locations;
- Enforceable California broadband technician apprenticeship and Environmental and Social Justice (ESJ) hiring requirements;
- An $8.5 million performance bond to back public-interest commitments; and

- Maintenance for existing community-investment funding for ten years.

Further, the CPUC's final decision on the merger largely accepted the two settlement agreements between Joint Applicants, California Emerging Technology Fund, and the Public Advocates Office, which did not go far enough to protect the public interest on their own. Ultimately, this final merger outcome is deeply disappointing, and we feel the decision falls far short of what consumers deserve.

Importantly, our organizations remain concerned about the speed and consistency at which large telco mergers are taking place in California. The Charter/Cox merger comes just one year after Verizon absorbed Frontier, consolidating market dominance between just four companies: Comcast, Charter, AT&T, and Verizon. While the Charter/Cox merger offers a few substantive public interest benefits – such as requiring Charter to adhere to current Public, Educational, and Government Access Channels laws – we caution against the continued and rapid consolidation of the marketplace without sufficient regulatory safeguards. Robust regulatory oversight and enforcement - along with a healthy, competitive marketplace - are essential to fostering a thriving digital equity ecosystem in California.