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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MBEP Collaborates with Regional Partners for Broadband Connectivity in South Monterey County**

(Marina, CA) - A signing ceremony formalizing the Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement (JPA) between the cities of King, Greenfield, Soledad, and Gonzales and the County of Monterey to create the South Salinas Valley Broadband Authority took place Friday, May 27 at Gonzales City Hall.

The JPA brings the South County cities and the County together and allows them to pool resources needed to develop and implement a Community Broadband Network that will provide the necessary and affordable internet and broadband needed in these cities and permanently end the digital divide. This network will cover the entirety of the South Salinas Valley region, within city limits and in unincorporated areas, to provide access for all communities at a reasonable price.

The formation of this JPA is one of the initiatives of Salinas Valley Five Cities (SVFC), which includes Salinas, King City, Greenfield, Soledad and Gonzales and is focused on the well-being of the Salinas Valley and the lives of students, families, and the valley's workforce. Monterey County Supervisor Chris Lopez worked closely with the SVFC and has been the driving force behind creating the JPA. Key partners and collaborators include Hartnell College, the Monterey County Office of Education, Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP), Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), and Golden State Connect Authority (GSCA). Supervisor Lopez's leadership within RCRC and GSCA was instrumental in establishing partnerships with these organizations and they will work closely with the JPA to design, fund, and develop the Community Broadband Network.

The JPA establishes the governance foundation that will coordinate development of the framework, establish the geographic area, invite collaboration and economies of scale, and most importantly, apply the equity lens needed to put forward compelling and competitive funding applications resulting in the ability to deliver broadband for all in South County. Partnering with RCRC and GSCA will provide the JPA access to technical assistance and financing sources necessary to deploy an open-access municipal broadband network. Initial funding for administrative support of the JPA will be provided by members of the JPA. MBEP will provide consultation to the JPA.

MBEP President and CEO Tahra Goraya described the JPA's formation as a trailblazing move built upon the efforts of many unsung advocates who have worked relentlessly to advance awareness of issues around broadband equity and infrastructure, including Gonzales City Manager René Mendez, Monterey Bay Economic

Partnership Chief Operating Officer and Broadband Director Freny Cooper, and Steve Blum of Tellus Venture Associates.

“Congratulations to all of our partners who worked tirelessly on this effort; special thanks to Supervisor Lopez, and City Manager Mendez for their leadership. Monterey Bay Economic Partnership believes that high-speed broadband is an essential service in today's society and should be accessible and affordable for all residents in the Monterey Bay region as we strive toward healthy communities and inclusive economies,” said MBEP President and CEO Tahra Goraya. “Our organization has long worked to bring solutions that can close the digital divide and we are proud to be a partner in moving this collaboration and JPA forward.”

Soledad Mayor Anna Velazquez said the JPA changes the narrative and paves the way for rural cities across California.

"It is incredibly unfortunate that it took a global pandemic to show that we can no longer wait to secure high-speed internet," said Velasquez, "but it is incredibly fortunate that, working together at the local, county, state level, this is the beginning of a new business model for providing broadband in rural communities and the South County region. All of Monterey County will do better when all of Monterey County is connected to real, high-speed internet."

View a recording of the signing ceremony, which streamed live on the City of Gonzales' Facebook page, [here](#).

**About Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP):**

[Monterey Bay Economic Partnership](#) (MBEP) is a regional member-supported nonprofit organization consisting of public, private, and civic entities located throughout the counties of Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz. Founded in 2015, our mission is to improve the economic health and quality of life in the region.