

March 3, 2021

Joint Committee on Ways & Means - Transportation & Economic Development Subcommittee
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Support for Broadband Infrastructure Funding in Business Oregon Budget

Co-Chairs Beyer and Gomberg, and Members of the Committee:

Currently, there is a very real and widening digital divide in Oregon. The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated working, learning, and playing from home. The historic wildfire season destroyed essential communications infrastructure. The [2020 Oregon Broadband Study](#) estimates that it would cost \$1.32 billion to connect all unserved and underserved communities with broadband internet access service. This letter highlights support from the undersigned for including the historic levels of broadband infrastructure funding contemplated in the Governor's Recommended Budget in HB 5023, the Business Oregon budget.

Business Oregon has been home to the State Broadband Office since 2018. The Broadband Office has been tasked with developing broadband investment and deployment strategies; managing and awarding funds allocated to the office for broadband projects; and supporting and promoting broadband planning more generally. The Governor's Recommended Budget allocates \$100 million for broadband infrastructure projects to be furnished by the Broadband Office. This critical investment will:

- Help unserved and underserved communities access technology and provide all communities, despite location or size, adequate service;
- Make Oregon more competitive in receiving federal funds. Many federal programs require a 10% state match to access federal dollars, and others require broadband strategic plans;
- Ensure critical infrastructure for Oregon's business community and growing workforce that is dependent on technology to stay competitive. COVID-19 has forced many people to work from home and some employees will continue working remotely even after the pandemic;
- Provide a remote healthcare opportunity for people and families who are not close to in-person health services; and
- Rebuild and update critical infrastructure that was damaged during Oregon's 2020 wildfire season.

It is imperative for the Business Oregon Budget to include \$100 million for broadband infrastructure. The digital divide will only continue to grow if Oregon does not make significant investments in broadband infrastructure in the coming biennium. The undersigned encourage the committee to support funding the Governor's recommended allocation for this purpose in full.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

