



March 20, 2020

Senator Arnie Roblan, Co-Chair
Representative Paul Holvey, Co-Chair
Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Draft Emergency Actions for COVID-19

Dear Co-Chair Roblan, Co-Chair Holvey, and Members of the Joint Committee on Coronavirus Response:

On behalf of the Oregon Municipal Electric Utilities Association, the Oregon People's Utility District Association and the Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on the Draft Emergency Actions for COVID-19. Oregon's 36 consumer-owned utilities support Recommendation #5 in the Draft to "Increase financial assistance directly to utilities to help low-income households and small businesses." There is no doubt that the disruption caused by COVID-19 will make it difficult for many Oregonians to pay for their utility bill. It is important to note that Oregon's COUs do not have a profit motive and will continue to work with our consumers struggling to pay their bills during this unprecedented time. However, given the massive unemployment from business closures, the sheer magnitude of this event threatens to overwhelm our existing assistance programs.

We also believe it is important that this program benefit *all* Oregonians, no matter what type of utility ownership. Many of our utilities serve outside the Portland Metro region in counties that have not shared in the economic recovery. These include higher unemployment areas along the Oregon coast and eastern Oregon. Other utilities in western Oregon still have consumers paying down their balances after the devastating 2019 winter storms. Therefore, we urge you to make this a statewide program that will attempt to help all Oregonians. We also pledge to work with the Legislature and state agencies to ensure accountability so that these funds are directed at the appropriate customers.

As we know you appreciate, our utility workers are essential to ensuring a safe and reliable electricity and we must keep our employees healthy and safe. Please ensure they are prioritized, along with other key emergency responders, for access to testing and protective equipment. Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter for all Oregonians.

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