

Item 6: Public Utility Commission

Oregon Telephone Assistance Program

Analyst: Gregory Jolivette

Request: Establish Other Funds expenditure limitation of \$3,500,000 for the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) for funding from the Coronavirus Relief Fund received by the Department of Administrative Services and transferred to the PUC to temporarily expand access to affordable telephone and broadband service for low-income households.

Description: The Oregon Telephone Assistance Program subsidizes local telephone and broadband service rates to about 42,000 eligible low-income Oregonians by providing up to a \$12.75 monthly discount. The cost of the subsidy is shared by the state and federal government. Eligible households include those with income at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines and households enrolled in SNAP (food stamps), Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, or federal Public Housing Assistance.

The one-time monies from the Coronavirus Relief Fund will be used to increase the subsidy to \$21.25 per month for six months with the aim of providing financial relief for up to 8,000 more low-income households and increasing access to broadband service. This would be achieved by temporarily raising the state portion of the subsidy from \$3.50 per month to \$12.00 per month. The PUC indicates the higher state subsidy can be in place as soon as July 1, 2020.

Recommendation: The Co-Chairs of the Emergency Board recommend establishing a \$3,500,000 Other Funds expenditure limitation for the Public Utility Commission for funding from the Coronavirus Relief Fund received by the Department of Administrative Services and transferred to PUC to expand access to affordable voice and broadband services for low-income Oregonians.