



June 5, 2020

Members of the Legislative Emergency Board:

The Oregon Telecommunications Association (OTA) and the Oregon Cable Telecommunications Association (OCTA) collectively represent the private industry that provides the vast majority of facilities-based, fiber fed, high speed internet access in this state. This broadband is provided to individuals, businesses, schools, clinics and government entities in rural, remote, and urban Oregon.

When recent events led the state to shut down, the public looked to our members to provide the internet access they needed to cope with working and learning from home, all at the same time. That our companies and networks rose to the challenge and met the needs of Oregonians is a testament to the significant investments our companies have made in their networks and communities.

Beyond providing high-speed internet access, our members went above and beyond by launching efforts to enroll customers; making commitments to *not disconnect subscribers* for inability to pay monthly bills; opening up wi-fi hotspots for public use *free of charge*; and providing devices and broadband service *free of charge* to help ensure our communities and families stayed connected.

Recently, we learned that the Oregon Legislature intends to allocate funding to further enhance broadband service where it does not exist or service is deemed inadequate in nature. A laudable goal to be sure and a goal that we share. That said, the OTA and OCTA have two issues with this effort: 1. Neither association was contacted to provide input on this critical issue; and 2. The ability to achieve this goal appears limited by program design and an inability to access funding unless entering into a partnership agreements.

In addition, recent guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Treasury may limit CARES Act expenditures for broadband.

As such, the proposal appears to fall short in addressing issues presented by COVID – immediate internet access for those individuals and families forced to work and learn from home, in particular those communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the virus. Not only does the proposal not serve communities that have been impacted, the approach leaves out those with the expertise in broadband networks and the demonstrated experience in building out infrastructure

We respectfully ask the Legislative Emergency Board to reconsider this allocation and that any public funds allocated to enhance broadband in Oregon be subject to an open, competitive RFP process, regardless of whether or not a public entity is involved. While we agree that private-public partnerships can be a worthwhile part of the solution, that is not the only, or in many cases best way to proceed.

Funding must be utilized to bring broadband access to those areas that are unserved. This means that the funds should be used to complete projects that brings service to those areas that currently have no access to broadband, so as to focus on the areas most in need of support.

Further, if you do advance this funding, we ask the Legislature to ensure, on the record, that these funds will not be used to build over existing, adequate broadband facilities. Failing to do this one thing could lead to a waste of public funds, fail to solve the problem of a lack of broadband access, and strand privately made network investments.

The OTA and OCTA represent network technicians, installers, and support personnel dedicated to providing access to broadband services that Oregonians want and need during these times. Our companies employ the people who are the experts in increasing broadband capacity. As you continue to consider investments in broadband infrastructure, we urge you to include us as meaningful participants in any effort to provide additional connectivey to Oregonians.

Respectfully,

Brant Wolf

Oregon Telecommunications Association

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Oregon Cable Telecommunications
Association