



# Telehealth Alliance of Oregon

*Advancing telehealth knowledge, practice and policy in Oregon*

February 11, 2019

## **The Telehealth Alliance of Oregon supports HB 2173 and HB 2184**

Dear Chair Lively and Members of the House Economic Development Committee,

The Telehealth Alliance of Oregon supports HB 2173 that creates Oregon Broadband Office within Oregon Business Development Department and 2184 which removes the exemption for wireless carriers from contributing to the Oregon Universal Service Fund and creates a grant program for broadband projects using the Oregon Universal Service Fund. Passage of both of these bills will have a positive impact on healthcare for many Oregonians.

Many rural Oregonians, including the elderly and those with chronic illnesses, cannot easily access healthcare services because broadband does not exist in their areas. This is frustrating as the telemedicine technologies that could provide healthcare services are plentiful and robust, but they cannot function successfully without broadband. Rural Oregonians deserve the opportunity to manage their healthcare from their communities and from their homes. Without these opportunities, care is often delayed often causing the healthcare problem to be exacerbated and much more costly to treat.

The expansion of the OUSF will provide opportunities to provide broadband services to areas where traditional fiber is not affordable or where other solutions can be better utilized. The new Office of Broadband will provide fair consideration to the needs of these hard to serve areas and require accountability for the dollars spent.

SB 622, passed in 1999, established a state-wide system of six interconnecting fiber rings providing the impetus for carriers to invest in broadband to many rural areas, but there are still areas in need, so I would encourage the committee to provide the tools needed to help finish the job that was begun in 1999. The future of healthcare depends on a strong telecommunications system for all Oregonians.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

Catherine S Britain, Executive Director