

January 31, 2020

House Committee on Revenue  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Se. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

**RE: Support for HB 4079 – Rural Telecommunications Investment Act**

Dear Chair Nathanson and Members of the House Revenue Committee,

MINET and Willamette Valley Fiber of Monmouth, Independence and Dallas strongly support HB 4079 which would expand the Oregon Universal Service Fund (OUSF) to include cell phone users in the fee pool. This will generate additional funds needed to establish a sustainably funded broadband grant program within the newly established Broadband Office. The OUSF was established in 1999 and has never included cell phone users. In 2020, cell phones far and away dominate the telecommunications service but unlike landlines, have not been required to share in the fiscal responsibility for infrastructure that ultimately benefits their industry.

Currently, there is a very real and widening digital divide in Oregon. Communities, primarily in rural areas, are without broadband access. As technology rapidly progresses, they are at risk at being continually left behind.

The passage of HB 4079 will:

Help communities leverage federal funds. Some federal programs require up to a 10% state match to access federal dollars. The Broadband Fund will be one potential source for that match. Additionally, some federal programs, like USDA Reconnect, require that a community have a broadband strategic plan in place to qualify for federal dollars. The Broadband Fund will provide grants for communities to develop broadband strategic plans.

Prioritize schools and libraries that serve as anchor institutions and bring connectivity to a community. Once broadband has been brought to a place, it is easier to build upon the network.

Allows school children growing up in smaller rural communities to have the same opportunity in school as those in larger urban areas.

Create a critical piece of infrastructure for Oregon's small businesses who are becoming more dependent on technology to be competitive.

Provide a critical healthcare link for people and families who are not close to health services.

In the three cities served by MINET and Willamette Valley Fiber residents enjoy a base internet speed of 150 Mbps down and up – speed is symmetrical. A gig and beyond is available to every user. Access to reliable high speed broadband has attracted business to our communities, including an FCR call center with over 200 jobs. High end apartments have quickly filled with residents who telecommute because the broadband is available. And because of broadband the City of Independence is becoming a “Smart City.”

But MINET and Willamette Valley Fiber don't want to stop there. So many small towns in rural Oregon have little or no broadband access. Our desire – our strongly held moral obligation - is to work together with these towns to get broadband to their door, and even assist them in securing feasibility studies and seeking grant funds.

Broadband is a vital component for economic development, education and health. Please help close the digital divide and support HB 4079.

Sincerely,



Don Patten  
General Manager  
MINET & Willamette Valley Fiber