



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF STEVEN C. CORBATÓ, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LINK OREGON, IN  
SUPPORT OF H.B. 4079 BEFORE THE OREGON HOUSE COMMITTEE ON REVENUE**

*February 4, 2020*

Chair Nathanson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you very much for this opportunity to contribute testimony to the hearing that will consider House Bill 4079 introduced by Representative Marsh and Senator Roblan with the sponsorship of nineteen of their colleagues in the House and Senate. I am writing on behalf of the organization which I lead – the Oregon Fiber Partnership, better known as Link Oregon.

Link Oregon is an Oregon-based, non-profit consortium of the state's four public research universities (OHSU, Oregon State University, Portland State University, and University of Oregon) and Oregon State Government through Enterprise Information Services (formerly OSCIO). We were established last year to develop and to operate a statewide, high-speed, facilities-based optical network to provide both point-to-point and advanced Internet connectivity for our members as well as other public and non-profit entities around Oregon. We already provide this level of connectivity to Oregon's public universities, several community colleges, and through working in partnership with Educational School Districts, over sixty of the nearly two hundred public school districts around the state. Our Bylaws limit our scope to serving our members, and we work very closely with both private and public telecommunications providers around the state in support of our mission. An explicitly stated goal of our organization is, as a side benefit of our work, to support the advancement of broadband initiatives in rural Oregon through the sharing of best practices, technical collaboration (e.g., local peering), and our financial investments that help carriers improve their facilities.

In my career, I have had the opportunity to work in the initial development and the expansion of two other state networks in the western United States – the Washington State K-20 Network and the Utah Education and Telehealth Network (UEN). I also have led the national network that connects these state networks under the auspices of the U.S. higher education non-profit organization, Internet2. In these previous roles, I have seen first-hand the power of a coordinated, statewide educational networking platform to deliver advanced curriculum and testing capabilities to smaller school districts and to provide unique educational opportunities otherwise unavailable to students in rural settings. At this time, I feel particularly honored to have the opportunity to lead a team and to serve a Board of Directors strongly committed to delivering similar capabilities to Oregon's public and non-profit sectors, particularly in support of students.

I will make several observations from my extended involvement with UEN (Advisory Group and later Board membership between 2008 and 2015). In Utah, I witnessed the positive benefits of a strong, visible partnership between the state public network and the state broadband office. As a public network, UEN regularly shared its technology insights and progress and performance data at public meetings of the state broadband advisory council. I believe that with the recent formation of the State Broadband Office under Business Oregon and the emergence of the Link Oregon network, we are well on our way to establishing a similar mutually beneficial relationship with a focus on advancing broadband access for the people of Oregon generally, especially for those communities and rural settings challenged by this critical capability.

According to the most recent data (Fiscal Year 2019) from the Oregon Department of Education, eleven Oregon school districts proposed connectivity projects valued at \$26.3 million to utilize a combination of E-Rate discounting and FCC matching funding, yet requiring \$2.2 million in State match. However, the funding for this State match was not available last year. The bottom line is that leveraging available federal funding *could have delivered benefits* to Oregon's K-12 students worth *over twelve times the State's investment*.

Even before this miss, we have long felt that Oregon's institutions were not as well positioned as they could be to exploit the existing federal broadband funding opportunities, such as the FCC E-rate program for K-12 and community broadband programs in the U.S. (Departments of Agriculture (Rural Development) and Commerce (National Telecommunications and Information Administration)). Specifically, Oregon needs a sustainable state funding mechanism to adequately leverage the billions of dollars in federal funding that is available. Frankly, Oregon has not been positioned well to garner our full *fair share* that other states are using to address their broadband gaps.

The limited funding that HB 4079 will provide (capped at five million dollars maximum) will serve as critical seed funding for the state Broadband Fund. In turn, this Fund will provide matching funds for rural school districts and rural communities as they seek and obtain federal broadband funding. This fund should be viewed as a long-term investment that can be matched by the proportionately much larger federal funding that is available.

During my nearly two years in this leadership position, I have traveled the state extensively and visited all but one county to date. In rural communities in eastern Oregon, such as John Day and Lakeview, I have witnessed the cumulative impacts of broadband deficiency on the quality of education and healthcare and prospects for economic development. In conversations with former County Commissioner Ken Kestner and his fellow broadband champions in Lake County, I came to understand the broadband vulnerability that this community currently faces. Its connectivity depends on a single fiber optic cable path from Klamath Falls at risk of fiber cuts and other system failures due to lack of redundancy.

Again I thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of H.B. 4079. Link Oregon is ready to provide any further information that the Committee may require.