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February 2, 2021

House Committee on Economic Recovery and Prosperity
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support of House Bill 2654

Dear Chair Lively, Vice-Chair Cate, Vice-Chair Kropf and Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Broadband Advisory Council (OBAC) supports House Bill 2654 concerning Broadband Easements.

OBAC was created in 2009 to help ensure the implementation of statewide broadband strategies in Oregon. The mission of the council is to encourage coordination and collaboration between organizations and economic sectors to leverage the development and utilization of broadband for education, workforce development and telehealth, and to promote broadband utilization by citizens and communities.

On November 1, 2020, OBAC submitted its sixth report to the Oregon Legislative Assembly on the status of broadband in Oregon. All six reports have recommended that Oregon's broadband public policy should work to eliminate and reduce barriers to broadband deployment, adoption and utilization so that the community and economic development benefits of broadband access may be realized. Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated that broadband is an essential service. A recent survey by the Oregon Public Utility Commission found that 100% of survey respondents believe that broadband is either "important" or "very important" while many parts of rural Oregon go unserved or underserved.

House Bill 2654 is intended to address a long-standing barrier to broadband infrastructure investment and deployment in a manner that does not require any funding from Oregon's general fund. Easements/rights-of-way have been a barrier to extending broadband facilities to rural Oregon. Electric Cooperatives building broadband networks are a promising solution to bringing broadband to rural Oregon. This Bill provides for the electric utility easement to allow for broadband infrastructure while creating a mechanism for compensating landowners if their property is devalued. The provisions of the Bill are also open to any service provider that installs broadband infrastructure as defined in ORS 276A.406. Six states: Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Missouri, and Pennsylvania have adopted similar statutes that help to expand broadband infrastructure into rural areas of those states.

OBAC supports this effort and encourages all parties to work to resolve any issues concerning this Bill so that it may be passed for their mutual benefit and the benefit and prosperity of rural Oregonians.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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