



February 4, 2021

Representative John Lively, Chair
House Economic Recovery and Prosperity Committee
900 Court St. NE, HR C
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Lively and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding HB 2507 which decouples Oregon Telephone Assistance Program from funding offered by Federal Communications Commission. The City of Portland strongly supports this bill.

The COVID-19 pandemic has required many people with compromised immune systems, older adults, and people with disabilities to remain indoors to comply with physical distancing, elevating the need for the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program (OTAP).

OTAP is an essential service used by thousands of low-income Oregonians. For so many, it is their literal lifeline that connects them to emergency services, healthcare, family, education, employment, and resource opportunities. This program affords them phone and internet service that they might otherwise have to forego.

The City prioritized assistance for digital access needs of underserved Portland residents with CARES Act dollars. \$5 million in CARES Act funding went to support computing devices, digital literacy training, and internet service assistance. Through this funding 8,429 Visa cards loaded with \$356 each were given to residents struggling to stay connected to be used to help cover the monthly cost of internet service of their choosing. While the City recognized the need for public assistance to keep vulnerable residents connected to the internet, the City's ability to fund such assistance must compete with other critical City services such as housing and food assistance. For this reason, the City supports establishing public policy that helps to sustain assistance programs.

Through the City's implementation of its Digital Equity Action Plan, we have seen firsthand how important choice in internet providers and service levels is for residents, particularly low-income residents. The City supports this legislation, giving residents more options for service and making participation in the assistance plan a requirement for all relevant providers.

The need for this critical program has not changed despite changes in funding at the federal level. It is now the responsibility of the State of Oregon to ensure that our vulnerable residents continue to have access to this essential program.

We hope that this is the first step in securing access to the technology all Oregon residents need to live and thrive in our world today. The City of Portland urges your support for HB 2507.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elisabeth H. Perez". The script is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end of the word "Perez".

Elisabeth H. Perez
Interim Director, City of Portland Office for Community Technology