

April 15, 2021

Senator Betsy Johnson, Co-Chair
Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, Co-Chair
Representative Dan Rayfield, Co-Chair
Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means

RE: SB 5555 Funding for Project Oasis – Yamhill County Childcare

Dear Committee Members:

As the regional economic development organization serving Oregon’s Mid-Willamette Valley, SEDCOR focuses our efforts on traded sector companies seeking to grow, expand, or locate in our region. We believe partner-supported, industry-driven solutions to community problems, such as OnlineNW’s Yamhill County Rural Broadband Expansion Project, are key to community health and resiliency.

Extending access to broadband in rural communities has been a challenge for as many years as the technology has been available. For most private service providers, the cost to reach rural communities (let alone individual residences) does not “pencil out” well enough for the investment to be made. Work in these areas requires significant investment and “corporate risk” for these private partners and is most often only achieved with the support of public funding. Work-from-home and distance learning related to the COVID-19 pandemic greatly exacerbated this issue for our rural communities.

We support this project as an impactful public/private partnership, and a COVID-19 recovery program for families, communities, and businesses. There is an additional meaningful component of providing for emergency communications through this project, which speaks to ongoing community resiliency. Online NW has been coordinating with the Yamhill County Sheriff’s office, Mac Power & Light, and the Grand Ronde Tribe to ensure that tower locations are placed in areas that also serve to support the emergency communication system - while serving the most rural residents in our communities. We believe this project meets the Governor’s principles for use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds in the following ways:

1. **“Make big impact”** – This project aims to make a very big dent in a significant problem in Yamhill County, by providing access to high-speed internet to every residence and business in the county, through a combined wireless/cable approach that will provide for redundancy and resilience.

2. **“Address disparities that were exacerbated by the pandemic”** – This is a rural broadband expansion project, serving the underserved people and unserved areas of the county.
3. **“Make Oregon more resilient”** – Though broadband is not officially considered a utility, we know that our families, businesses, and emergency service providers require internet access in order to stay informed, remain “up to speed”, and to communicate and find resources in case of emergency. Expanding service throughout the county creates that type of resiliency.
4. **“Invest in programs where the pandemic has shown us there is a better way”** – We expect that a need for continued distance learning and remote work will be a constant for many families and businesses, into the future. Providing for the infrastructure now, also provides for better options in the future.
5. **“These are one-time funds”** – This project is seeking capital funding to build out infrastructure. These one-time funds will support the development of that infrastructure. OnlineNW will budget and manage ongoing expenses and will not create an additional demand for public operating support.
6. **“Public accountability and participation will be key”** – This project has received start-up funding from Yamhill County and has been identified by Regional Solutions as a priority project, and the by the Yamhill County Economic Development Council as a priority area for workforce recovery. OnlineNW is also launching an online webpage seeking community input.

SEDCOR and our partners support this project and believe this ARPA funding will make a significant impact to members of the workforce, and their families, in Yamhill County and the region. Ultimately, SEDCOR is committed to working with our public and private sector partners in the community to make certain that the most appropriate structure is in place to assist OnlineNW in managing the award to ensure project success.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Erik Andersson
President