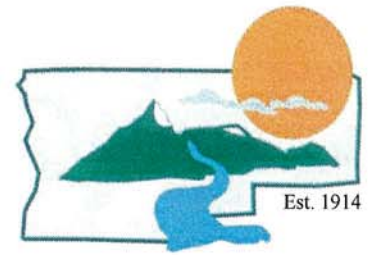


JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



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April 14, 2021

Co-Chairs

Senator Johnson, Senator Hayward and Representative Rayfield
Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development

Re: State Broadband Office Funding

Dear Co-Chairs,

Broadband stakeholders representing large swaths of rural Oregon have come together to in support of the broadband budget items in the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB) and make recommendations on the prioritization and implementation of the dedicated funds.

Our group represents: The four-county Broadband Action Team representing stakeholders in Lincoln, Linn, Benton and Lane Counties, Jefferson County Broadband Action Team, Columbia Pacific Economic Development District, Lake County, the City of Madras and the Linn, Benton, Lincoln Educational Service District.

Members of our group have been working tirelessly over the past year to help rural jurisdictions overcome broadband challenges posed by COVID-19 and the Wildfires, and to set plans in motion to ensure rural communities are not left behind as Oregon begins to build back better.

First, we ask for your support and allocation of the \$100 million in general obligation bonds and consider dedicating the funds for the following purposes:

1. Planning and Technical Assistance Grants: \$10M

Prior to COVID-19 and the Wildfires, jurisdictions struggled with having enough capacity to engage in critical planning and community engagement processes. That has only become more acute post-emergencies. This funding would allow rural jurisdictions and coalitions (including Broadband Action Teams) to hire consultants to guide the creation of local and regional broadband strategies, resource development, community engagement and planning for shovel-ready projects.

2. Digital Inclusion Grants: \$10M

COVID-19 has shown how the digital divide has acutely impacted different members of our communities—from seniors trying to access telehealth, to non-native English speakers trying to access language-responsive content, low-to-moderate income and rural children struggling to access homework and more. Funding in this area would support the five elements of digital inclusion (as defined by the National Digital Inclusion Alliance): 1-affordable, robust broadband internet service; 2-internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; 3-access to digital literacy training; 4-quality technical support; 5-applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.

3. Library Modernization Grants: \$10M

Libraries are community hubs for digital access and inclusion—providing free computer access, digital literacy training, workforce training, coding camps and other STEM activities. This fund would support the modernization of libraries across the state with higher broadband speeds, training and better devices.

4. Broadband Projects Grants: \$70M

This fund would support shovel-ready projects that would deliver broadband to homes and businesses in Oregon. Various technologies, such as fiber to the home, satellite, wi-fi, etc. would be supported.

Secondly, we ask for your support in funding additional positions in the State Broadband Office. Currently there is one person staffing the entire Broadband Office. It is impossible for this staff member to engage with community members, coalitions and jurisdictions across the state and provide them with the technical expertise and support they need to undertake the critical work of broadband planning, community engagement and design of projects, while also providing staff support to the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council. We recommend that at least five additional broadband positions (consultant or temporary staff) be brought on. These positions would mirror the additional capacity provided through the Planning and Technical Assistance fund proposed above. This would move projects ahead at a much quicker pace and ensure Oregon's broadband future.


In addition, we recommend that the State prioritize:

1. Projects that incorporate equity and inclusion priorities established in the state's [Equity Framework in Covid-19 Response and Recovery](#).
2. Projects that deliver 100/100mb—not the lower FCC standard of 25/3mb. 100mb projects will allow Oregon to be future-ready. The FCC standards are a bare minimum and we believe would put Oregon behind the curve economically and socially.

It is important that the application for this funding is “right-sized”. In Oregon, we have an abundance of smaller Internet Service Providers (ISPs) who connect our citizens to broadband. Some federal applications for broadband funding take up to 300 person hours—time that smaller ISPs cannot afford. The application needs to be accessible to the companies that deliver services, especially in our rural areas, so that we do not have a “David vs. Goliath” application process.

Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,



Kelly Simmelink, Chairman



Wayne Fording, Commissioner



Mae Huston, Commissioner