



February 2, 2022

House Committee on Economic Recovery and Prosperity
900 Court Se. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HB 4092 with the -2 amendments

Chair Lively and Members of the committee,

The League of Oregon Cities supports HB 4092 with the -2 amendments. We have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic that connectivity is crucial to modern life. It is being relied on for how people do business, learn, and receive important services like healthcare and emergency services. Broadband access is the key to connectivity. Oregon is set to receive hundreds of millions of dollars related to broadband. The state will need to spend that money in ways that are effective in mitigating barriers to broadband access including through infrastructure, planning, mapping, and affordability. HB 4092 will help the state address barriers to broadband by strengthening the state broadband office's governance structure, setting a strategic framework to guide the broadband office, allowing the broadband office to access more mapping data to guide their decisions, and creating paths for more digital equity.

Governance Structure and Strategic Framework

Currently, the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council is not in a position to provide oversight to the Oregon Broadband Office. HB 4092 gives the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council that authority. The bill also creates a road map or framework to guide the broadband office's investments. The Oregon Broadband Office will be in charge of record level broadband funding and there should be a governance structure and framework that has accountability measures built in. The -2 amendment would update the OBAC reporting requirements from a biennial comprehensive report to an annual update of its strategic plan and a list of all grant and loan statuses that go through the broadband office. This will allow the legislature to continue to be apprised of the progress of this incredible amount of funding.

Mapping Data

Broadband mapping data to assess service availability and quality locally and regionally in Oregon is essential for informed decision-making. Good mapping data is also a prerequisite for investment in sustainable, inclusive broadband infrastructure that leaves no one behind. In the past, many communities have been misrepresented as served with broadband because one household in a census block had service. HB 4092 creates a path for the Oregon Broadband Office to work with providers to collect appropriate information and develop accurate statewide maps for identifying gaps and implementing broadband goals.

Digital Equity

Section 6 of HB 4092 creates the Connecting Oregon Libraries Fund, which will be similar to the Connecting Oregon Schools Fund that was created in 2018. This fund will allow Oregon libraries to be more competitive for federal funds like the federal E-rate program. Many cities have their own libraries within their jurisdictions. Libraries play a key role in connectivity and serve as a free access point to those who do not have adequate service and/or devices to surf the internet. Additional investments in libraries will help all Oregonians and make broadband access more equitable.

Section 7 would require the Oregon Public Utilities Commission in consultation with the Broadband Office and the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council to open up an investigation into the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program which provides low-income broadband and telephone subsidies. This investigation would explore ways in which to expand the OTAP program and identify any other barriers to broadband affordability. Affordability continues to be a barrier to Oregonians accessing quality broadband in small and large cities. Community members will continue to be left behind if we can not find a way to make broadband more affordable.

We urge your support on HB 4092-2!

Respectfully,

Jenna Jones
League of Oregon Cities
jjones@orcities.org