



February 20, 2023

Chair Bynum, Vice-Chairs Morgan and Nguyen and members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB 3201. My name is Rachael Maddock-Hughes and I am the founder of Sequoia Consulting, a rural technical assistance firm focused on helping communities secure funding, and launch new initiatives across a broad array of sectors, including broadband. I grew up in rural Linn County, and through my work as Deputy Director of the Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments, I saw first-hand how much funding and how many opportunities rural communities were leaving on the table. That's why I started my firm and I've been proud to work with dozens of communities across communities in Oregon over the last three years.

For the past two years, I have been working with Broadband Action Teams across the state to create local solutions to address the broadband gaps that exist, particularly in rural and frontier communities. Broadband Action Teams are community-based coalitions of public, private and nonprofit partners who are dedicated to ensuring all households have access to fast, affordable and reliable internet. These coalitions are made up of cities, counties, education and health stakeholders, and Internet Service Providers. The broadband challenges that exist need strong partnerships to support long-term solutions—and broadband action teams facilitate exactly this.

At this point, nearly every county in Oregon now has an active Broadband Action Team. I also lead our state-wide working group for Broadband Action Team Leaders that has been critical in coordinating advocacy efforts across the state, identifying funding opportunities, and providing a critical link between communities and the Oregon Broadband Office.

Broadband Action Teams have been working diligently to identify priority broadband projects, and help secure funding for these projects. But it's not easy, especially for rural and frontier communities. The three biggest challenges for rural communities in securing state and federal funding, are capacity, expertise and access to resources (for pre-planning, design and match funding).

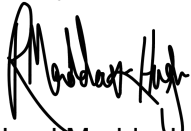
We are at an unprecedented, historic moment of investment for broadband across the US, and in Oregon. With up to \$700M or more coming to Oregon, we have a chance to truly make a difference for the future of our rural and frontier communities. And these rural communities, most frequently through their Broadband Action Teams, are putting what little resources and capacity they have toward securing this funding.

I believe that HB 3201 will help ensure local efforts are rewarded with the funding they need to address their broadband gaps, and that funding is equitably distributed- particularly to rural and frontier communities. HB3201 will do this by engaging a fair, and equitable challenge and appeal process that does not disincentivize local communities with limited capacity and resources from going after grant funding. The proposed process encourages early dialogue among stakeholders, and timely appeals that will not hold up critical broadband infrastructure projects or allow projects to be vetoed once an award has been made. This will help ensure that the resources and capacity that the Broadband Action Teams and other rural and frontier communities put into grant applications, won't be wasted, and that local communities and solutions are supported.

The hardest to reach communities are going to need their local stakeholders—the BATs—advocating on their behalf to meet the broadband gaps that still exist. It's gong to take everyone rowing in the same direction and making sure local priorities and local solutions are front and center. We need to make sure those efforts are rewarded, and not disincentivized.

Thank you for considering HB3201.

Sincerely,



Rachael Maddock-Hughes
Founder and Principal
Sequoia Consulting
Rachael@sequoiaconsulting.org
503-810-4985
www.sequoiaconsulting.org