



Comments of the Oregon Telecommunications Association
Opposition to HB 2757A
House Revenue Committee
April 27, 2023
Brant Wolf

The Oregon Telecommunications Association (OTA) represents traditional and competitive providers of broadband and telecommunications services. Our thirty-seven provider members deploy and maintain state of the art telecommunications networks throughout rural and remote Oregon. The OTA does not represent the wireless or cable industries.

When the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) mandated the adoption of 9-8-8 as the three digit number for the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, our members impacted by this order all readily complied. Our member companies recognize the value and hard work of mental health professionals in our communities.

The OTA is opposed to HB 2757A and this position relates solely to the imposition of a new fee on our customers.

Based on prior comments offered on HB 2757A, it is important to note and understand that the FCC did not direct states to impose 988 fees. The clear majority of states have not adopted any such fee. Most states have used their own general fund dollars, federal funds or some combination of the two in order to fund 988 systems and response teams if they have taken action at all.

The size of the proposed fee in HB 2757A is greater than that of any other state currently imposing such a fee.

Imposing a fee on our customers and using the resulting 988 fund to provide an actual response to an individual experiencing a mental health crisis is a significant departure from how fees of this nature are used in Oregon. For example, the following three digit dialing programs are all managed by state agencies and do not offer direct services supported by a fee on customers:

911 – supports the infrastructure necessary to respond to emergency situations. The associated does not support law enforcement, fire or EMS response.

511 – provides timely and useful information for motorists regarding road conditions in Oregon. Has no end user fee associated with its program and does not provide any kind of actual roadside assistance.

811 – the Call Before You Dig service. Has no end user fee associated with its program and does not provide any actual facilities locations services.

711 – translation service for deaf and hard of hearing Oregonians. Uses funds from the Residential Service Protection Fund (RSPF) fee for this purpose.

The OTA believes that imposing a new fee for 988 service and using the resulting fund to provide an actual response is such a significant departure from past practice that we have no other option than to oppose this bill as it's currently written.

The OTA urges the legislature to continue making good use of its own general fund dollars and if possible federal funding to support the 988 system and crisis response teams.

Finally, the OTA believes that assurances need to be made that if this bill passes with a fee, that fee is applied to all telecommunications service providers in an even, non-discriminatory manner. It is worth mentioning that might not be the case with current language.

To conclude, the OTA fully supported the implementation of the 988 dialing system to access the National Suicide Prevention Hotline. Our opposition to HB 2757A relates only to the imposition of a new fee and the use of that fee to fund the actual response effort to a caller's mental health crisis situation.

The OTA is opposed to HB 2757A and urges the House Revenue Committee not to pass it out of Committee.

The OTA urges the House Revenue Committee to encourage the use of the general fund to provide support to the 988 system for crisis response efforts.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.