RDI
RURAL DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES
Helping Rural Communities Thrive!

March 21, 2023

Co-Chair Senator Aaron Woods
Co-Chair Representative David Gomberg

Senator Bill Hansell
Senator Mark Meek
Representative Jami Cate
Representative Kevin Mannix
Representative Mark Gamba
Representative Nathan Sosa

RE: SB 5524

To the Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development:

Rural Development Initiatives (RDI) is writing to petition the members of the Subcommittee to consider the specific and unique impact of SB 5524 on rural Oregon communities. RDI is grateful to the members of the Subcommittee for their attention to this vitally important funding.

When RDI began, first, as the Community Initiatives Program of the Oregon Economic Development Department (1989), then later, as a private nonprofit transformed by SB713 (1992), our charge was to assist rural communities experiencing abrupt and devastating changes to their economies. For 31 years, RDI's staff has worked alongside people in Oregon's rural communities as they have grappled with ongoing economic challenges and instabilities, reimagined new economic and community building strategies, built the leadership skills needed to work together, and rolled up their sleeves to do the work.

Rural economies are characterized by a high dependency on low-wage workers and small businesses, limited access to healthcare, dilapidated facilities, and inadequate access to childcare and senior services. RDI is responding to demand from Oregon's small towns; helping them address complex problems in more geographic isolation, with fewer financial resources, few models designed to fit their situation, and more confusing or less trusted information sources than larger population centers.

RDI asks the Subcommittee to consider (1) **full funding for SBDCs** in rural regions as essential support to small businesses, (2) continued support for the **Technical Assistance for Underrepresented Businesses and Economic Equity Investment programs**, to focus on the disproportionate impact to Latinx and tribal communities in Oregon's rural places, and (3) **full funding for the Rural Opportunity Initiative**, a proven model supporting community-based organizations in their efforts to create vital entrepreneurial and small business ecosystems. We are also **strongly in support of the $100M proposed to address childcare deserts across the state.**

Thank you for your timely and thoughtful service to the residents of Oregon.

Rurally yours,

Heidi Khokhar, Executive Director

2023 Rural Policy Priorities:
Pathways to Vital Rural Places

Who is RDI?

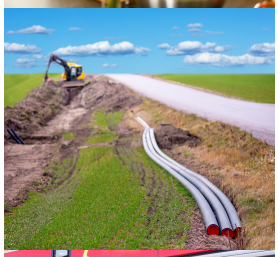
Rural Development Initiatives (RDI) is a regional nonprofit serving rural communities in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. We support local people in their efforts to create vital, inclusive economies through public policy advocacy, community training and engagement, and access to resources and technical support.

How do we advocate for rural?

RDI has worked in over 300 rural places for the last 30 years, and we communicate with a network of thousands of rural people. We provide information about bills with rural impact, we train rural people who want to engage better with local, state, and federal government, and we support legislation that helps rural communities and economies.

What are rural priorities for 2023?

- PROGRAMS THAT BUILD RURAL COMMUNITY CAPACITY, including skill building in leadership, civic engagement, economy building, and access to resources.
- PROGAMS THAT PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE for emerging entrepreneurs and underrepresented businesses – with particular emphasis on services to the Spanish-speaking population, including businesses in child care, food service, forestry, and construction.
- EFFORTS TO PROVIDE STATE MATCH DOLLARS for federal grant programs, including the establishment of a designated fund for rural match.
- Legislation to expand and improve ACCESS TO BROADBAND in rural.
- Legislation to provide technical assistance and funding for RURAL WILDFIRE community recovery and resiliency.



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