March 21, 2023

Senator Aaron Woods and Representative David Gomberg,
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development Oregon State Legislature

Dear Co-Chair Woods, Co-Chair Gomberg, and members of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development,

My name is Andrea Letham, and I am offering testimony to represent High Desert Partnership, a technical assistance provider that has received funding from Business Oregon's Technical Assistance program. This program has been incredibly valuable to our community, and I strongly encourage you to continue its funding.

High Desert Partnership works in Harney County, one of the most rural and remote parts of the state. With a population of only 7,495 over 10,226 square miles, we have less than one resident per square mile. The largest town in the county, Burns, has a population of only 2,757. Businesses in a place like Harney County face unique challenges and opportunities. They are historically and frequently overlooked by major support systems, and many rural communities lack stable business infrastructure.

Through funding by the Business Oregon Technical Assistance program, our project supported local-led business development, not only in Harney County, but across Eastern Oregon in Malheur, Baker, Union, and Wallowa counties, as well as with the Burns Paiute Tribe. Through partnerships with local service providers already embedded in the community, we have supported direct business counselors, operating through close personal relationships. This plays to the tight-knit strengths of small, rural communities.

At the time of our last report, we had provided nearly 350 individual businesses with almost 1,400 hours of direct service. Our clients have included businesses in ranching and farming, food service, retail, and more. These small businesses are the backbone of rural communities, providing an economic base and essential services, and Business Oregon's funding has been vital to helping us weather the uncertainty of the past few years. We thank you for this support and ask you to continue funding the program.

Thank you,
Andrea Letham

Andrea Letham
Business Advisor- Treasure Valley Community College Small Business Development Center
Biz Harney Coordinator for High Desert Partnership