



League of Oregon Cities Testimony in Support of HB 4040 -1

Chair Bynum, Vice-Chairs Nguyen and Diehl, and Members of the Committee. My name is Nolan Pleše, lobbyist at the League of Oregon Cities.

Thank you all for having me here today. As many of you know, the League of Oregon Cities (LOC) represents 241 cities, ranging from small to medium, to large communities with very diverse constituencies and experiences. The LOC strongly supports HB 4040 with the -1 amendment.

In 2022, the Legislature, the LOC, and other partners recognized that we stood on the precipice of historic funding for broadband infrastructure from the federal government. In anticipation of this funding, we came together to pass HB 4092 to remake the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council (OBAC) and provide the necessary mechanisms and oversight of this funding to ensure that Oregon can provide an efficient and transparent process for providing grants.

Due to concerns about the challenges for the new OBAC and a small staff at the Oregon Broadband Office (OBO) at that time from some members of the coalition, we created the Grant Application Review Committee (GARC) to provide technical expertise to the grant review process and help determine and make recommendations to Business Oregon for final recommendations.

The LOC did share the same concerns but supported the compromise.

Fast forward to today and things have changed. The OBO has since hired multiple staffers and a consultant to provide additional expertise and support. Additionally, we have noticed that it's been incredibly challenging for the OBO and OBAC to find Oregonians willing to volunteer their time to sit on the GARC, thus delaying the GARC from convening. And that only includes the first GARC for the Broadband Technical Assistance Program (BTAP).

Furthermore, we have been notified that the current GARC process would provide an additional delay in the grant process, thus delaying Oregon's ability to get grants out to unserved and underserved communities. With the ARPA-BDP funds timeline and BEAD timelines, any delays could hurt Oregon's ability to spend the federal funding which could impact how many Oregon communities are served.

HB 4040 with the -1 provides a simple fix and has wide support from across the spectrum. It removes the GARC from the statute and replaces the grant application review process with OBAC. OBAC is an existing body that has diverse lived experience and expertise. OBAC was redesigned intentionally to provide a wide range of members from many backgrounds including local government, internet



providers, rural and urban business representatives, consumer advocates, Tribal representatives, and a member to represent digital equity for historically underrepresented communities. Their collective knowledge of these programs and expertise put them in the best position to provide a more efficient process to get grants out the door. As a public body, OBAC will provide the transparency that we all seek to ensure grants are awarded fairly and equitably to close the digital divide.

Finally, an emergency clause was added recognizing that it's vitally important this change goes into effect immediately given the timeline to spend funds is fast approaching. As an existing public body, the LOC has no concerns that the OBO and OBAC can carry out this change.

HB 4040 with the -1 amendment is a simple fix. The LOC encourages the adoption of the -1 amendment and quick passage of the bill. Thank you all for your time.

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