

SB 69 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Economic Development

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Meeting Dates: 4/10, 4/22

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Adds broadband internet access service to the Public Utility Commission plan to provide assistance to low income customers under the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Lifeline benefit (discount) available for either broadband or phone service, not both
- Aligning state and federal law

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

The 1987 Legislative Assembly passed a law ensuring that all Oregonians have access to adequate and affordable telephone service. Under that law, the Public Utility Commission (PUC) established three telephone assistance programs: Oregon Telephone Assistance Program (OTAP), Telecommunication Devices Access Program, and Oregon Telecommunications Relay Service.

The OTAP, also called Oregon Lifeline, is a federal and state government program that reduces the monthly cost of phone or broadband service for qualifying low-income households. The program reduces the cost of phone bills by \$12.75 per month; reduces the cost of broadband service by \$9.25 per month; or provides free phone or data service. The Federal Communications Commission provides \$9.25 per month and Oregon provides an additional \$3.50. Federal and state regulations limit the Lifeline benefit to one per household for either phone or broadband service. Individuals qualify if they participate in certain government programs or total household income is at or below 135 percent of federal poverty guidelines.

Broadband subsidies in the OTAP are currently provided by federal funds. Under Senate Bill 69, the PUC may provide assistance to low income customers for broadband internet access service under the OTAP.