

HB 2507 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Economic Recovery and Prosperity

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Meeting Dates: 2/4, 3/9

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Allows the Oregon Telephone Assistance Plan (OTAP) to be offered as a separate program apart from the program funded by the federal government. Extends the sunset of OTAP from January 1, 2023 to January 1, 2030.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Future changes to federal program
- Outreach to target population
- Differences between federal and state programs

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

In 1987, the Legislative Assembly enacted the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program, commonly known as Oregon Lifeline, with the goal of providing all Oregonians with access to adequate and affordable telephone service. Jointly funded by both the federal government and the state, the program reduces the monthly cost of telephone service for qualifying low-income Oregon households. Until 2019, qualifying low-income customers received broadband assistance only through the federal program. The Legislative Assembly aligned Oregon Lifeline with federal regulations by adding broadband to the services for which a qualifying low-income customer may receive state assistance in addition to federal assistance.

To qualify, customers must receive one of the specified benefits, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, or federal public housing assistance. Under the current program, qualifying customers receive a discount up to \$12.50 per month on their phone bill, up to \$16.25 per month on their broadband bill, or free cell phone or data service. As of December 1, 2020, federal funds cover \$5.25 of mobile voice support and \$9.25 of broadband support.

House Bill 2507 allows the state plan of assistance for broadband to be separate from the federal plan.