

SB 615 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY
Senate Committee On Labor and Business

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Meeting Dates: 3/18

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Establishes Low Income Broadband Bill Payment Assistance Fund. Directs Oregon Business Development Department to establish by rule program, administered by Oregon Broadband Office, for providing broadband bill payment assistance to low income households. Directs department to consult, coordinate, and collaborate with the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council. Allows for moneys in fund to be allocated by office to qualified nonprofit community-based organizations for purpose of providing low income broadband bill payment assistance.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

"Broadband" is a general term for telecommunications technologies and services that utilize a faster data transmission rate than a standard voice-grade telephone line. Oregon law defines broadband as bandwidth communications with a minimum speed of 25 Mbps for downloads and three Mbps for uploads. In its 2010 National Broadband Plan, the Federal Communications Commission proposed a goal that "every American should have affordable access to robust broadband service, and the means and skills to subscribe if they so choose." According to the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council's 2020 Broadband in Oregon report:

- 95 percent of Oregonians live in areas that have basic broadband service, with 41.6 percent of rural households and 64.1 percent of urban households subscribing to basic broadband or faster.
- Since 2015, broadband subscription prices have dropped over 20 percent and speeds have increased 15.7 percent.
- Oregon broadband subscribers pay between \$38 and \$53 per month.
- Rural communities have less access to wired broadband internet and pay up to 37 percent more on average for residential wired broadband.

Administered by the Oregon Public Utility Commission, the Oregon Lifeline is a federal and state government program that provides a monthly discount of up to \$16.25 per month on broadband service for qualifying low-income Oregon households. Applicants with SNAP, Medicaid, and Supplemental Security Income can qualify without documentation; other applicants must provide documentation of income at or below 135 percent of federal poverty guidelines or qualification for other benefits like Federal Public Housing Assistance.

Senate Bill 615 establishes a Low Income Broadband Bill Payment Assistance Fund and requires Business Oregon, through the Oregon Broadband Office, to establish a program to provide bill payment assistance to low income households. Business Oregon must consult, coordinate, and collaborate with the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council in developing the program.