

HB 3256 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Economic Recovery and Prosperity

Action Date: 04/01/21

Action: Do pass with amendments and be referred to Ways and Means. (Printed A-Eng.)

Vote: 8-0-0-0

Yeas: 8 - Cate, Clem, Kropf, Levy, Lively, Prusak, Ruiz, Wallan

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: No revenue impact

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Meeting Dates: 3/9, 3/16, 3/25, 4/1

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Requires the Public Utility Commission to investigate and make recommendations related to the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program by September 15, 2022. Specifies recommendations must relate to low-income assistance for broadband access and application of surcharge to support expanded broadband access. Outlines consideration for the investigation, including barriers to access by low-income customers, equipment needed, legal and regulatory incentives and limitations affecting state assistance, and availability of other forms of support. Establishes the Connecting Oregon Libraries Fund separate and distinct from the General Fund for the purpose of providing broadband access to eligible library facilities. Specifies eligibility requirements for a qualifying library to receive funds, including receiving federal moneys for the purpose of providing broadband access to the library. Requires the State Library to adopt rules regarding the awarding and distribution of funds to eligible libraries. Takes effect on 91st day following adjournment sine die.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Access to Oregon Telephone Assistance Program
- Affordability issues related to broadband
- Library access to broadband

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

Replaces the measure.

BACKGROUND:

The Public Utility Commission (PUC) is responsible for rate regulation of Oregon's investor-owned electric utilities, natural gas utilities, and telephone service providers, as well as select water companies. The mission of the PUC is to ensure Oregon utility customers have access to safe, reliable, and high quality utility services at just and reasonable rates.

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.

House Bill 3256 A requires the PUC to investigate and make recommendations related to Oregon Lifeline by September 15, 2022, and establishes the Connecting Oregon Libraries Fund for the purpose of providing broadband access to eligible library facilities.