



## **HB 2654 Testimony**

### **House Committee on Economic Recovery and Prosperity**

**February 4, 2021**

Chair Lively and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 2654. Our coalition represents landowners across the state who cumulatively own and manage thousands of acres with existing electrical utilities across them and who could be impacted by this bill. We want to start by emphasizing that we strongly support increasing broadband access, particularly in rural Oregon. We have worked for years to improve broadband access for our rural communities and believe that broadband is essential for healthy and prosperous rural communities, not only for our businesses, but for our children and families.

We also strongly support the intent behind HB 2654 – we agree that it is logical and efficient to co-site electrical and broadband lines where feasible and want to support incentives for co-siting in the future. However, as drafted, we have concerns that HB 2654 is going to be very problematic for landowners along existing utility lines. To briefly summarize our concerns, we are concerned that the bill allows for the expansion of easements without existing protections for landowners, contains definitions that are confusing or contrary to existing law, reduces landowners' existing protections when negotiating new easements, and creates potential liability for landowners for new broadband connections that they do not have input on.

The siting of utilities across private land is necessary for the provision of electricity – and now broadband – to rural areas. However, utility siting is reliant on a delicate balance of ensuring utilities' needs are met without interfering with private landowners' use of their property, particularly for natural resource uses. There are unique concerns related to the siting of broadband that must be addressed to ensure that broadband is responsibly sited and respects landowners' existing uses of their property.

We have raised these concerns with the proponents of the bill and are working on amendments to address them. We appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony and are looking forward to working with proponents and the committee to address our concerns.

Contacts:

Mary Anne Cooper, Oregon Farm Bureau

Dave Hunnicut, Oregon Property Owners Association

Tammy Dennee, Oregon Cattlemen's Association

Roger Beyer, Oregon Small Woodlands Association

Mike Eliason, Oregon Forest & Industries Council

Rich Angstrom, Oregon Concrete & Aggregate Producers Association