



April 9, 2021

Joint Committee on Ways & Means – Capitol Construction Subcommittee  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, Oregon 97301

**RE: Support for Statutory Authority to Finance Broadband Infrastructure**

Co-Chairs Girod and Holvey, and Members of the Committee:

Currently, there is a very real and widening digital divide in Oregon. The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated working, learning, and playing from home. The historic wildfire season destroyed essential communications infrastructure. If anything, this historic last year has proven that broadband is essential to participate in all facets of modern-day life. Prior to the global pandemic and historic wildfire season, the [2020 Oregon Broadband Study](#) estimated that it would cost \$1.32 billion to connect all unserved and underserved communities with broadband internet access service.

The Governor's Recommended Budget allocates \$100 million of certificates of participation (COPs) for broadband infrastructure projects to be furnished by the Broadband Office within Business Oregon. However, there is currently no statutory authority for COPs to be used for broadband. The Association of Oregon Counties and League of Oregon Cities support Section 9 of SB 5505 that provides the statutory authority so broadband infrastructure can be financed through COPs in Oregon. This critical decision will:

- Help unserved and underserved communities access technology and provide all communities, despite location or size, adequate service;
- Make Oregon more competitive in receiving federal funds.
- Ensure critical infrastructure for Oregon's business community and growing workforce that is dependent on technology to stay competitive. COVID-19 has forced many people to work from home and some employees will continue working remotely even after the pandemic;
- Provide remote healthcare opportunities for people and families who are not close to in-person health services; and
- Rebuild and update critical infrastructure that was damaged during Oregon's 2020 wildfire season.

It is imperative that COPs can be used for broadband infrastructure. The digital divide will only continue to grow if Oregon does not make significant investments in broadband infrastructure in the coming biennium. AOC and LOC urge the committee to support the statutory fix in Section 9 of SB 5505.

Thank you for consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Jenna Jones, League of Oregon Cities  
Mallorie Roberts, Association of Oregon Counties