

DATE: April 22, 2021

TO: Oregon Legislature Joint Committee on Ways and Means, Senate Bill 5555
Hearing Date: April 24, 2021

FROM: Anne Price
Resident Pacific City, Oregon

RE: Support for Representative Gomberg's request for \$2.6 million to provide broadband development for approximately 650 homes and businesses in South Tillamook County

Our local economy was, at one time, almost entirely dependent on resource-based industries, timber, fishing and farming in particular. Many, if not most, of our children followed in their parents' footsteps to work in these industries. But times have changed. These industries have declined for myriad reasons not to be debated here. State and federal resources have been redirected to the detriment of public services once underwritten by the tax dollars those industries produced. In one fashion or another Tillamook County's economy now seems to be increasingly dependent on the tourist industry. While tourism is a welcome source of funds for many local needs those funds are, logically, often directed at public services that serve the needs of tourism...to the detriment of services that benefit the broader resident population of Tillamook County. Nowhere is this truer than in South Tillamook County.

One of the most glaring deficiencies in South Tillamook County is the lack of broadband connectivity. Compared to most coastal communities our internet connectivity is slow, poorly maintained/supported by vendors, and unreliable. Quite frankly, I'm confident that our current internet service would be considered intolerable by most, if not all, of you reading this statement. This presents several serious challenges.

- **Education** - The necessity for computing in today's world cannot be overstated. As a small rural community, we have been "behind the 8 ball" for many years in south Tillamook County when it comes to internet accessibility. **Currently 50-60% of our Nestucca Valley School District (K-12) students do not have internet access from home.** This has resulted in a "lost" year for many of our students as we have struggled with the pandemic but it is not limited to the current challenge. The impact of the absence of this crucial educational tool will be generational. We are losing the potential of not just the current generation of students but, as their education suffers so suffers their ability to advance professionally and to encourage and support their children's education.
- **Economy** - Many of our traditional industries (dairy and forestry, for example) are increasingly dependent on internet connectivity. In addition, industries across the spectrum have awoken to the advantages of working from home. This is even more evident with our experience during the pandemic. With wider and more reliable broadband access we would have an opportunity encourage and support greater diversity in economic development in Tillamook County. Reliable broadband access for entrepreneurs and/or employees of large national firms would seem more than logical, in fact critical, as we try to diversify and sustain the economy in South Tillamook County.

- **Emergency/First Responder Support** - With the absence of reliable high-speed broadband connectivity, we put a significant percentage of our citizens, residents and tourists alike, at risk of delayed or no response from our dedicated emergency responders. Redundancy is particularly important with respect to emergency services. Emergency email notifications cannot be delivered if the only internet access point in the area has an outage. For the worst-case scenario, consider the possible consequences in the event of a tsunami or Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake.

We also see a degradation of internet speeds on the weekend when our unincorporated communities are full of tourists...another indication that the existing system is simply inadequate to serve today's needs.

- **Telehealth** - Health facilities and providers are few and far between in South Tillamook County. In addition to tourism our economy also depends on retirement income as our long-time residents age and new people retire to their "beach house." As telehealth services give access to a broader range of medical professionals our access to those services is severely limited without comprehensive broadband coverage to the home.

Ironically, Tillamook Lightwave owns and operates a cable landing station in Pacific City providing connectivity for academic research and national corporations. Broadband fiber literally runs from New Zealand, Australia and Hawaii through the unincorporated community of Pacific City. Yet the deficiencies mentioned above persist. We need to connect our homes and businesses to this network.

Beyond the myriad compelling reasons to dedicate significant funds to the development of broadband to homes and businesses in South Tillamook County, I think these funds need to be managed to prioritize redundancy and resiliency. The profit motive of our current broadband providers clearly finds more "fertile ground" in areas with higher density in terms of population. Leaving these matters of broadband development to "for profit" entities has resulted in the lack of broadband development in rural areas. It is my hope that with an investment of American Rescue Plan dollars we can design, install and maintain a system that will assure broadband access to virtually all South Tillamook County residents and our visitors. I think the project needs to be coordinated by an entity, Tillamook Lightwave comes to mind, that can employ people with some technical expertise who are not employees of our competing internet providers.

Thank you for your consideration of this serious challenge in South Tillamook County as you consider the disposition of American Rescue Plan dollars.