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April 25, 2021

Senator Rob Wagner, Chair
Committee Members
Senate Committee on Rules
State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Re: HB 2560A – Remote Access to Public Hearings

Dear Chair Wagner and Committee Members:

1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit, membership organization that works with Oregonians to support livable urban and rural communities; protect family farms, forests and natural areas; and provide transportation and housing choice.

We strongly support HB 2560A, which would make permanent the current COVID-related emergency/temporary requirement that all governments provide a remote access option for public hearings and meetings, “to the extent reasonably possible.” A technical amendment to the bill addressed a logistical need that cities raised.

Goal 1 of Oregon’s land use program is Public Involvement; it represents a commitment that Oregon’s residents will be provided accessible, equitable, and meaningful opportunities to participate in their community decision-making, at all levels of government.

HB 2560A is exactly what Goal 1 is all about. Prior to 2020, for most public hearings and decision-making,, access was through what might be the least inclusive way: in person, often at inconvenient times, at meetings that might last hours. Most of the changes we have all endured due to the corona virus pandemic are things we want to see in the rearview mirror, but providing remote access to government is not one of them. We should celebrate and continue the quick pivot that governments made to adapt across all decision-making.

Remote access to public hearings and meetings opens these to so many more Oregonians, as the in-person only nature of meetings excludes those who do not or cannot drive; many disabled individuals; rural residents who live far from their county seat or city hall; those who have family, school, or other obligations that prevent them from coming in person; and those of lower income who cannot leave jobs to testify in-person, to name a few examples.

HB 2560A is additive to in-person public hearings. It is one of the many ways that governments at every level should open up all public hearings, including expanding broadband access, getting out into the community, providing interpreters, and much more.

The extent and diversity of public testimony you have received supporting HB 2560A, and the range of organizations who have endorsed the bill (see attached), demonstrate the life-changing impact that providing remote access to government decision-making has had and will continue to have for all Oregonians. We also continue to hear comments from local governments of all sizes on how inspiring it has been to see local many more residents participating in their local government. HB 2560A represents a significant step to providing equitable access to government decision-making, and reinvigorating civic engagement.

We ask that you support HB 2560A. Thank you for consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

Mary Kyle McCurdy

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Kyle McCurdy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "M" and "K".

Deputy Director

