



**TESTIMONY OF TED CASE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OREGON RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND PROSPERITY
HB 4092
February 2, 2022**

Chair Lively, Vice-Chair Cate, Vice-Chair Kropf and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ted Case, and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association. ORECA represents 18 electric cooperatives that serve over a half-million Oregonians with affordable, reliable, and nearly carbon-free electricity. Many electric cooperatives are also involved in broadband to help improve the quality of life for our members. And that is why ORECA supports HB 4092, which we believe is one of the most important measures the Oregon Legislature can take to bridge the digital divide in rural and frontier Oregon.

The pandemic has demonstrated that expanding the ability to work remotely, learn online, and perform telemedicine is critical for Oregon in 2022 and beyond. Oregon's electric cooperatives, who serve in many areas where the broadband gap exists, offer some of the best prospective solutions for broadband in rural and frontier parts of the state. In fact, the very model that was successful in bringing electricity to rural America in the 20th Century is bringing broadband to rural America today. However, many rural Oregonians remain on the wrong side of the digital divide. The American Rescue Plan Act and Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act funds coming to Oregon – if properly executed – should help close this gap.

HB 4092 will help prepare the Oregon Broadband Office (OBO) for the work ahead and the significant resources that will come to Oregon to help provide services. ORECA is pleased that the appointment process for the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council in Section 1 of HB 4092 includes a member that provides telecommunications services in rural Oregon with preference given to a service provider that is headquartered in rural Oregon. It is vitally important that Oregon's rural voices are heard on the newly constituted OBAC, rather than distant out-of-state entities who only have a profit motive. ORECA also supports the much needed and long overdue mapping initiative in Section 4 of HB 4092 to help identify gaps and help implement broadband goals.

The State of Oregon has a historic opportunity to connect Oregon for the 21st Century. HB 4092 will position Oregon for this transition, and we urge its passage. Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on this important legislation.