



City of Portland

Office for Community Technology

▲ Broadband & Communications Policy

▲ Cable Regulation & Consumer Protection

▲ Utility Franchises, Licenses & Wireless

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Representative John Lively, Chair
House Committee on Economic Recovery and Prosperity
900 Court St. NE, HR D, Salem, OR 97301

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

The City of Portland enthusiastically supports HB 4092, Connecting Oregon for the 21st Century.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated the digital divide that exists between those who have access to affordable, reliable, and fast internet and those that do not. In order to reduce the spread of the virus, many important services shifted online thereby creating more challenges for communities who either lack or have inadequate access to broadband. Inadequate broadband creates barriers to access critical services such as health care via telehealth visits, work remotely, participate in distance learning, and engage civically. This makes internet access and digital skills essential now and will only continue as the trend to move services online accelerates.

Residents of rural census tracts account for **5 of 20** million zero-broadband (now wireline or wireless) households (ACS 2017) and **15 million** zero-broadband households are in “urbanized” census tracts where high-speed broadband has usually been available for years. The common thread among these unconnected households is limited income. Clearly, residents in urban areas like Portland should be prioritized as Oregon takes steps to ensure all Oregonians are connected.

HB 4092 takes a vital step in ensuring that a system of robust, sustainable, and statewide broadband services connect all Oregonians. At the Office for Community Technology, we believe that this legislation prepares the Oregon Broadband Office for the critical work before us. This bill updates the governance and oversight of the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council, sets strategic framing and mapping, creates a State-E-rate fund for libraries and creates a PUC study on modernizing the Oregon Telecommunication Assistance Program. We encourage the Governor to appoint members to the Broadband Advisory Council that represent the geographically diverse regions of the state and include urban representation that can speak to the interests of historically marginalized communities.

We believe that HB 4092 is a step in the right direction that will ensure that Oregon is poised to receive the more than \$200 million in federal dollars to invest in building services across our state. These unprecedented capital investments will provide the opportunity to address the deficiencies in the digital divide that currently exist.

We encourage your support for HB 4092.

Thank you,

Elisabeth Perez Director, Office for Community Technology