



February 1, 2022

Chair Lively
House Committee on Economic Recovery and Prosperity
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for HB 4092 with the -2 Amendments

Chair Lively and Members of the Committee,

Climate Solutions is a regional non-profit working to accelerate clean energy solutions to the climate crisis. Oregon expects to receive more than \$200 million from the American Rescue Plan Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, earmarked for the expansion of broadband services in our State. With these funds comes an unprecedented opportunity to invest significant capital into affordable internet service to ensure that everyone, including those disproportionately left without broadband services such as rural, low-income, and BIPOC Oregonians, have access to the essential services that broadband allows us to connect with. HB 4092 will create a structure that ensures those funds are utilized effectively and efficiently to accomplish the goal of closing the digital divide. As HB 4092 comes before the House Committee on Economic Recovery and Prosperity, we submit these comments in strong support. We also fully support the -2 amendments being considered in this bill.

The urgency of closing this digital divide was further highlighted by the pandemic, which laid bare the inequities caused by lack of broadband access. Over the last two years, reliable broadband internet has been a necessary component of everyday life, facilitating work, school, health care, and other essential services. During this pandemic, and likely for a long time after, broadband internet access will continue to be the mechanism by which we participate in society and meet our basic needs.

Essential reasons why we must act now to close the digital divide:

- Broadband internet has become an essential service that allows people to connect to economic and social opportunities and services. As we shift to a clean energy economy in response to the threat of climate change, broadband availability is necessary for all communities in Oregon to have connected, “smart” technology, appliances and vehicles.
- Connectivity is essential to our democracy. It facilitates access to information and data, creating a more informed electorate. Information is a bridge that ensures a just and equitable transition to a low carbon future.
- In a modern society, we must not deprive any Oregonian of their livelihood. Broadband internet is no longer just a privilege or amenity, but rather an essential lifeline.

A statewide broadband assessment and best practices study conducted *pre-pandemic* found a “rural-urban digital divide” and gaps in service quality that are pervasive in rural areas of the state. Additionally, urban areas with lower household income levels are far less connected than their higher income neighbors, even in cities well served by broadband infrastructure. This is not simply an availability issue, but also an affordability issue. According to the latest OECD data, among 35 countries studied, the United States had the second highest broadband costs. Those who cannot afford broadband internet (disproportionately rural, low-income and BIPOC communities) are deprived of livelihoods, health care, and economic opportunities, leading to negative life outcomes.

HB 4092 would ensure that a system of robust, sustainable, and statewide broadband services connects Oregonians into the future. These are important first steps in realizing a more equitable, just, and comprehensive broadband internet landscape. HB 4092 is the vehicle for lifting Oregonians – *all Oregonians* – into the 21st Century and ensuring that information is available to all regardless of location, situation, or income level. We urge your support for HB 4092.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Joshua Basofin

Joshua Basofin
Clean Energy Policy Manager
Climate Solutions