

HB 3201 A STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs

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Meeting Dates: 4/27

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Requires the Oregon Business Development Department to provide financial assistance in the form of loans or grants for purposes of supporting broadband access, affordability, and adoption. Allows Department rulemaking. Requires the Department to give preference to proposed projects that serve unserved or underserved areas. Provides process for challenging applications. Provides judicial review of final orders. Requires the Department to consult with the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council to establish goals for broadband service speeds provided in the state to determine unserved or underserved areas. Makes Oregon Broadband Fund permanent and consists of loans; donations; transfers to the fund from federal, state and local agencies; lottery bonds allocated by the Legislative Assembly; and earnings received on money in the fund. Removes existing statutory definitions for ‘unserved’ or ‘underserved’ populations. Removes existing rules regarding the use of the Fund; including provisions requiring the Department identify and notify broadband service providers within or near the geographic area that would be benefit by a project proposed by an eligible applicant and the right of first refusal by existing broadband providers for new projects in nonresidential areas. Declares emergency, effective on passage.

FISCAL: Minimal fiscal impact

REVENUE: No revenue impact

SENATE VOTE: 43-15-2

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

During the First Special Session of 2020, the Legislative Assembly created the Oregon Broadband Fund (Fund) in recognition of the need to address the digital divide between rural and urban areas, as well as in historically underserved and unserved areas in Oregon. During the pandemic, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which included funding to address broadband access. The federal funds are intended to target unserved, underserved, and tribal communities and improve digital equity in historically marginalized communities across the state.

House Bill 3201 A requires the Oregon Business Development Department provide grants and loans for supporting broadband access, affordability, and adoption. The measure updates current provisions for the Fund and makes it permanent.