



March 8, 2023,

To: Economic and Small Business Committee

From: City of La Pine

Re: HB 3201 Aligning Statute to Maximize Federal Broadband Funding

Chair Bynum, Vice-Chairs Morgan, and Nguyen, and Members of the Committee,

The City of La Pine supports HB3201 which aims to update Oregon's current Broadband Fund to reflect existing technology needs and the requirements of varying funding sources. Access to affordable and reliable high-speed internet is an issue that has universal positive impacts across communities, geographies, and political divisions. The digital divide is the economic, educational, and social inequalities between those who have computers and internet access and those who do not. While rural communities are significantly impacted by a lack of internet service, communities across our state lacking adequate access are subject to this distinct disadvantage.

ARPA, Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD), and IIJA funds are intended to target unserved, underserved, and tribal communities equitably and improve digital equity in historically marginalized communities across the state. We appreciate every effort to demonstrate the State's commitment to closing the digital divide, particularly within our unserved and underserved communities. HB 3201 offers the flexibility needed to ensure Oregon can maximize the federal dollars coming to our state, which means more funding for our communities. Further, it provides an approach that is not a one-size-fits-all to ensure a strategic and targeted funding allocation. Oregon's public investment must be different from the "business case" methods that have left too many rural, frontier, and historically underserved communities in our state behind.

The last few years have demonstrated that the digital divide reaches across the state. In our community many rural residents, particularly in unincorporated areas abutting the city, often discuss their inability to access internet speeds that allow them to participate in the larger social

fabric of civic life. This was most pronounced through the narrative I continued to hear during the height of the pandemic, in which a consistent measure of school district students reported the inability to adequately participate in online education platforms. The outcome of this may yet to be realized, but will unfortunately be felt over the years to come. The state must recognize that we must serve rural, frontier, and historically underserved communities with innovative solutions that include, but are not limited to, private sector partnerships. Long-term investments and solutions are needed to ensure that broadband is accessible and affordable for all Oregonians.

Thank you for your continued leadership in working towards closing the digital divide and ensuring all Oregonians have access to affordable, reliable, and accessible broadband. We welcome an opportunity to further engage with the committee on these critical issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Geoff Wullschlager".

Geoff Wullschlager
City Manager
City of La Pine

Cc: file