



LINK
OREGON

Steve Corbató | Executive Director
corbato@linkoregon.org
503-998-3957

April 23, 2023

Senator James Manning, Jr.
Chair, Committee on Veterans Affairs, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs
Oregon Senate
900 Court Street NE
S-209
Salem, Oregon 97301
Email: Sen.JamesManning@oregonlegislature.gov

Dear Chair Manning,

I am writing in strong support of House Bill 3201-A, as passed last month by the Oregon House following the bill's introduction under the chief sponsorship of Representatives Marsh, Owens, and Neron and Senators Woods and Campos.

I serve as the executive director of Link Oregon, a non-profit organization established by the four largest research universities in Oregon (OHSU, OSU, PSU, and UO) and the State of Oregon's Enterprise Information Services unit. Link Oregon's principal mission is to operate a facilities-based, middle-mile network to serve both the public and the non-profit sectors across Oregon. A modern, sustainable broadband ecosystem across the state is critical for our founding members to connect effectively with as many Oregonians as possible to support remote learning, telehealth, innovation, and digital government, among other essential purposes.

At this generational moment for addressing long-standing gaps in consumer broadband service, unprecedented levels of federal funding are in the pipeline. However, due to current statutory limits on the Broadband Fund administered by Business Oregon, our state is at risk of losing some of or all the programmatic allocations that combined may approach \$700 million. The existing statute also constrains Oregon's ability to spend the allocated federal funding effectively and efficiently.

HB 3201-A aims to bring Oregon's statute into alignment with federal rules, guidance, and best practices by eliminating unnecessary restrictions on the Broadband Fund. These restrictions conflict with the federal digital equity goals that include ensuring that modern cost-effective infrastructure is in place to support the availability of affordable, reliable high-speed connectivity services. While the underlying technologies and the national broadband standards will continue to evolve, we recognize that the Broadband Office, under the guidance of the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council, is the proper place to establish the minimum service standards.

HB 3201-A is the product of a statewide broadband workgroup convened last year by Rep. Marsh. I joined a broad range of stakeholders, including representatives from the Oregon Broadband Office, front-line community leaders, and public and private sector representatives to participate in this inclusive process through a series of regular meetings.

HB 3201-A will:

- Ensure that the Broadband Fund speed requirements reflect current and evolving technology needs and requirements of federal funding sources.
- Continue a preference for unserved and underserved areas in Oregon.
- Provide a process for public notice and an opportunity for comment on applications in locations where projects are already underway or already completed, ensuring that any conflicts are identified and addressed early in the proposal development process.
- Address the need for a robust, fair challenge process for grant awards through the independent Judicial Review Process as outlined in the Oregon Administrative Procedures Act (APA).

We support the adoption of this approach so that Oregon will be better positioned to receive all the federal funding that the state is entitled to receive and to distribute it efficiently and equitably to all Oregon communities — particularly those historically unserved and underserved locations —with the aim of closing the digital divide.

Finally, we note that this period of broadband investment will not be the limited, two-year sprint as the last period of federal broadband stimulus (2009-10 under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) was. The current funding process, active deployment, and concurrent digital equity efforts undoubtedly will represent a marathon of six to eight years in duration. As a state, we still have much work ahead of us in this race – defining long-term broadband mapping and effective grant match strategies, promoting workforce development with union participation, and ensuring robust cybersecurity practices, sustainability, and accountability. The passage of HB 3201-A will position us at the starting line in good standing.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input and for your continuing leadership to advance the level and reach of modern broadband service for all Oregonians.

Link Oregon strongly endorses HB 3201-A as passed by the House.

Sincerely,



Steven Corbató
Executive Director