

HB 3201-A: Aligning Statute to Maximize Federal Broadband Funding

Please Join us in supporting HB 3201-A!



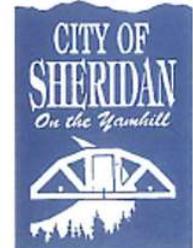
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Oregon State University
Hatfield



City of Tualatin

City to the Sunset



Problem:

Oregon is at risk of losing out on hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funds for improving broadband infrastructure because of statutory limits on the Oregon Broadband Fund. Existing statute will also limit Oregon's ability to spend those dollars effectively and efficiently.

Solution:

HB 3201-A is the product of a broadband workgroup led by Representative Pam Marsh. This group included a broad range of stakeholders, including representatives from the Oregon Broadband Office (OBO), front-line community leaders, and public and private sector representatives. This bill aims to bring Oregon statute into alignment with federal rules, guidance, and best practices by eliminating unnecessary restrictions on the Broadband Fund. HB 3201-A will:

- Ensure that Broadband Fund speed requirements reflect current technology needs and requirements of 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 that are already underway. This will ensure any conflicts are identified and addressed early in the process.
- Address the need for a strong and fair challenge process for grant awards through an independent Judicial Review Process as outlined in the Oregon Administrative Procedures Act (APA).

Background:

Prior to the pandemic, Oregon lawmakers recognized the need for broadband funding to address the growing digital divide between rural and urban areas, as well as in historically marginalized communities in every corner of the state. In the first special session of 2020, the Legislature passed SB 1603 and created the Oregon Broadband Fund, which predicted a maximum allocation of \$5 million a year. This fund was designed to focus extremely scarce resources on households with no service or extremely slow service.

During the pandemic, Congress passed the bipartisan infrastructure act (IIJA) and funded the ARPA Capital Projects Fund to work toward closing the digital divide. Between the two funds alone, Oregon *may* be eligible to receive up to \$700 million to improve broadband service and infrastructure across the state. These funds are intended to target unserved, underserved, and tribal communities and improve digital equity in historically marginalized communities across the state.