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[www.klamathidea.org](http://www.klamathidea.org)

March 12, 2025

Hon. Senator Aaron Woods, Co-Chair

Hon. Representative David Gomberg, Co-Chair

Joint Committee on Ways and Means - Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development

Oregon Legislature

Salem, OR 97301

**RE: SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS OREGON'S RURAL OPPORTUNITIES INITIATIVE PROGRAM (HB 5024)**

I am writing to you from rural south central Oregon where I am proud to have the privilege of serving as the Director of Klamath IDEA, an entrepreneurial development and ecosystem building initiative serving Klamath County.

As you know, efforts to bolster economic prosperity in rural Oregon require an outsized package of resources. ***Business Oregon's Rural Opportunity Initiative (ROI)*** has been instrumental in Klamath IDEA's growth from a fledgling, volunteer-led experiment to a fully-functioning, robust nonprofit that is making a real difference in the economic landscape in Klamath County. ROI's support has helped us to deploy a full-featured, purpose-built digital platform that houses our customer relationship management tool, hosts our SiteConnex website, and features the physical manifestation of our never-ending quest to connect entrepreneurs to the right resources at the right time – SourceLink's Resource Navigator™. The Resource Navigator™ organizes our 26 (and counting) entrepreneurial resource partners into a complex and ground-tested taxonomy of potential entrepreneurial resources to give entrepreneurs access to any part of our ecosystem at any time of day or night. In addition, it gives us valuable data-driven insight as to what our entrepreneurs are looking for and what resources our ecosystem lacks. Were it not for ROI's investment in our work, we would not have had the resources to leverage such an important tool for our entrepreneurs.

Additionally, ROI's support has been instrumental in our transition from a hosted relationship to an independent nonprofit agency. The program has supported valuable technical assistance needs such as filing our 1023 and creating a foundation of governance so that our journey as a nonprofit began on solid footing and our team was able to focus on our mission.

We very much appreciate that ROI is not a bureaucratic, top-down model, but one that allows communities to decide for themselves how to leverage entrepreneurship as a viable economic development strategy. It encourages and leverages community collaboration and expects reasonable – yet impactful – outcomes from its communities.



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Because of ROI, we've been able to prove the concept that entrepreneurship can be a viable economic development strategy. This has given credibility to our work and attracted additional funding from private foundations and our local governments.

This work is a team sport and it's a long game. Along with its collaborative model, ROI's strength is its tiered approach to supporting communities and its ability to "meet them where they are". This reinforces that the support is not indefinite; rather, it is intended to help organizations like ours get on their feet and onto stable ground while they prove the effectiveness of their work. During that period when impacts come in fits and starts, ROI gives organizations like ours an opportunity to prove through measurable outcomes that entrepreneurship should be part of all rural communities' economic development strategies. This program has been critical to getting our community's entrepreneurial development effort off the ground and we hope that you'll continue to support funding for ROI in this and future sessions.

**Thank you for your consideration,**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "W. Darin Rutledge", written over a faint, larger version of the signature.

**W. Darin Rutledge**  
**Director**