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OREGON HOUSE DEMOCRATS

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Legislation to Expand Rural Broadband Internet Passes Oregon House

Supports individuals and small businesses in rural Oregon

SALEM – Legislation passed today by the Oregon House of Representatives will boost broadband internet now and into the future for rural communities, supporting individuals and small businesses.

“The coronavirus crisis has demonstrated beyond doubt that broadband is vital for our physical, social, economic and physical health,” said Rep. Pam Marsh (D-Ashland), a longtime proponent of expanding rural broadband access. “Individuals and families who lacked access to broadband over the past three months missed out on public health information, remote work opportunities, online learning, health appointments, digital grocery deliveries, live-streamed religious services, and much more.”

[Senate Bill 1603](#) establishes the Broadband Fund to support projects for planning or developing broadband service infrastructure, and for the administration of the Oregon Broadband Office. It subjects the sale of all retail telecommunications services, retail commercial mobile radio services, and retail interconnected voice over internet protocol services to the universal service fund surcharge to support the Broadband Fund.

Business Oregon estimates 21% of urban residents, and about 43% of rural ones have no internet, or services that are well below minimal FCC standards. Across the state we have more than 50 schools with no or inadequate broadband, and about a third of our public libraries fail to meet FCC residential broadband standards. Under the Fund, schools and libraries will have first priority for projects.

“In rural communities like the ones I represent, a lack of access to high speed internet can hinder our personal interactions, education, and economy,” said Rep. Anna Williams (D-Hood River). “Rural Oregon is reeling from this pandemic. This is a critical step in our recovery and could help make us more resilient than ever.”

Senate Bill 1603 passed 38 to 19 and now goes to Governor Kate Brown for her consideration.

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