

Chair Lively, Vice-Chairs Cate & Kropf, and Members of the committee:

For the record, my name is Kari May, and I am the Library Director at Jackson County Library Services in Southern Oregon. On behalf of the Oregon Library Association, I want to thank Representative Marsh for including libraries in HB4092, and to all of you for recognizing the role that libraries play in connecting communities, in this case literally, with broadband infrastructure. OLA is supportive of HB 4092 with the -2 amendments.

Section 6 of the bill would establish a State E-Rate fund, called the Connecting Oregon Libraries Fund. To be clear, the bill does not include funding for the fund, it simply establishes it. Eventually, the Connecting Oregon Libraries Fund would be used to provide matching funds for qualifying public libraries who receive Federal E-Rate funds for broadband infrastructure projects and meet other criteria to be determined by the State Library by rule. We are supportive of this provision and look forward to working to get the program up and running once the state fund is established.

E-Rate is a federal reimbursement program managed by the FCC. It provides discounts for internet connectivity and network infrastructure to eligible schools and libraries. Discounts range from 20-90% and is based on the number of students eligible for free and reduced lunches. The discounts cover broadband infrastructure and on-going reductions to internet bills.

In Jackson County, we recently upgraded our internet speeds at all of our branches, and the cost was reimbursed at 80% through E-Rate. Our connection speeds range from 100MBS to 1 Gig at most of our branches and 10GB at our central library in Medford. We are fortunate to have a robust broadband infrastructure at all 15 of our branches, which serve communities ranging from the more urban setting in Medford to remote rural communities such as Ruch, Applegate, Butte Falls, and Prospect. In many communities, the library is the only internet connection some residents have access to – in Ruch and Applegate, for example, 40% of students do not have access to the internet in their homes.

At the current definition of broadband (25/3), 10% of libraries across the state do not meet the definition. If you look at speeds of 100/100, that percentage increases to 40%. This bill would provide an opportunity for more libraries to receive funding to increase their connectivity so that they can better serve their communities.

As we saw more clearly than ever during this pandemic, having reliable internet access is critical. Working from home and attending school online only works with internet access that allows for streaming, or indeed any connection at all. Libraries provide an accessible option for individuals without reliable internet at home, but only if they have adequate bandwidth themselves.

Thank you for considering our request to support HB 4092 with the -2 amendments.