



Honorable Governor Kate Brown  
Office of the Governor  
900 Court St NE, Suite 254  
Salem, Oregon 97301

April 7, 2021

**RE: \$130 million American Rescue Plan Act Funding Request for Oregon's Special Districts**

Dear Honorable Governor Brown:

On behalf of the Oregon Library Association, I would like to thank you for the financial support that was provided to special districts from the first round of federal COVID-19 relief funds. Your allocation of these funds to special districts helped address the critical needs of our community. **I am writing to you to request a \$130 million allocation from the State's American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funding for Oregon's special districts.**

Based on a recent survey conducted by the Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO), Oregon's special districts are anticipating a \$562.3 million impact through this year due to the pandemic. More than half – 53 percent – will have reduced essential services provided to Oregonians while 35 percent will have reduced their frontline workforce through this year. All of the nearly 300 fire, rescue and emergency districts have felt some degree of impact due to the pandemic and anticipate ongoing effects as they provide first-response services to their communities, and Oregon's port districts have taken a 20 percent hit on their annual operating budgets.

The Oregon Library Association is especially concerned about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on special library districts and the important services they provide. Currently there are 25 special library districts that service a total population of 760,000 Oregonians. These Oregonians rely on library districts for access to the Internet and technology, digital inclusion support, early literacy programming, and myriad library materials including audio and electronic books as well as print books and more. Across the state, libraries have partnered with schools to offer comprehensive digital reading programs in response to facility restrictions. Libraries are critical supports for workforce development, providing Internet access to find and apply for jobs as well as print and online tools to help people build their skills.

In your 10-Point Plan for Oregon's equitable and rapid economic recovery, you specifically identified supporting resilient rural communities and investing in Oregon's infrastructure. Special library districts are essential for supporting our disadvantaged rural communities. For example, in southern Oregon, students and families have relied on the 24/7 WiFi available at all the branch libraries to complete homework and apply for employment benefits. Many libraries are also lending hotspots to extend access during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are grateful that Congress has approved \$2.628 billion for the State of Oregon and \$1.5 billion for Oregon's cities and counties, but unfortunately special districts – a large sector of Oregon's local governments – have the potential to be overlooked during this distribution of

Coronavirus Relief Fund monies. This year, SDAO, in partnership with the National Special Districts Coalition (NSDC), supported federal legislation which would have required states to allocate 5% of their relief funds to assist special districts. This bill had the support of Senator Wyden and Congressman DeFazio.

Congress provided a flexible solution to this problem in the ARPA, empowering states with authority to transfer Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery monies specifically to special districts. Accordingly, the Oregon Library Association urges you to use this new transfer authority as intended to distribute a portion of Oregon's State Fiscal Recovery funding to Oregon's special districts. Fortunately, a process was already created during the first round of COVID-19 relief funds to distribute funds to districts through DAS; we encourage you to utilize this mechanism in this next round of fund distribution.

As indicated in SDAO's polling, the estimated fiscal impact to Oregon's special districts is \$562.3 million. We know this is not a reasonable amount to expect for special districts considering the State's other needs, but we do believe that the 5% allocation (\$130 million), as previously proposed at the federal level, is fair and reasonable, especially considering that cities and counties are receiving a direct allocation of approximately \$1.5 billion. In many rural areas of our state, more citizens receive the majority of their municipal services from special districts rather than from cities or counties.

Thank you for your consideration of our request to secure a \$130 million allocation from the State's ARPA funding for Oregon's special districts. Securing this support will relieve some of the financial stress felt by over 900 local government entities in the state, especially in our rural communities. With the majority of special districts operating in rural Oregon, this funding is essential to maintain services and support community infrastructure.

The Oregon Library Association urges the Senate President, Speaker of the House, and the Tri-Chairs of Ways & Means to distribute a portion of Oregon's State Fiscal Recovery funding to support the crucial services provided by special districts across the state of Oregon.

Sincerely,



Kate Lasky  
President 2020-21  
Oregon Library Association

cc: Senate President, Peter Courtney  
Speaker of the House, Tina Kotek  
Senate Majority Leader, Rob Wagner  
House Majority Leader, Barbara Smith Warner  
Senate Republican Leader, Fred Girod  
House Republican Leader, Christine Drazan  
Ways & Means Co-Chairs  
CRF Round #1 Legislative Workgroup Members