

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20510

July 6, 2021

Secretary Tom Vilsack  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue Southwest  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We are writing to express our support for the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District's (MCEDD) application to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA RD) Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) Program.

MCEDD has a proven track record of creating opportunity in the Mid-Columbia region through their administration of the Oregon Investment Board, and partnership with Skamania County Economic Development Council to administer the Washington Investment Board. Through prudent use of past funds, MCEDD and the Investment Boards have spurred economic development in the region, creating nearly 1,000 new jobs. Their work is vital to communities in the Mid-Columbia region and a new infusion of federal funds would be well-timed to stimulate job creation in the local economy.

The Mid-Columbia region encompasses an incredible combination of ecosystems, wildlife, farmland, communities and cultural resources – some dating back 10,000 years. The region attracts over two million annual visitors through unique recreational activities and tourist attractions, generating significant economic activity in the region. Given the area's unique geography, it is also susceptible to economic impacts from natural disasters such as wildfire and extreme weather.

In 2017 the Eagle Creek Fire burned over 47,000 acres of forest in the region, threatening homes and businesses, evacuating communities, and shutting down major roads. The following year, the Substation Fire burned 78,000 acres through prime wheat land in Wasco County, OR. Major ice storms have paralyzed transportation networks and businesses on both sides of the river in 2017, 2020, and 2021. Gorge businesses, sensitive to transportation access and tourism, have felt the effects.

We believe MCEDD's efforts are a good match for these funds, and we thank you for your full and fair review of MCEDD's grant application. Should you have any further questions, please contact Dan Mahr in Senator Merkley's office at (503) 326-3386; or Jacob Egler in Senator Ron Wyden's office at (541) 330-9142; or Bree Rabourn in Senator Patty Murray's office at (206) 553-5545; or Madison Brown in Senator Maria Cantwell's office at (206) 220-6389; or Rachel Katz in Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler's office at (360) 695-6292; or Caroline Hinkley in Representative Bentz's office at (202) 225-6730.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



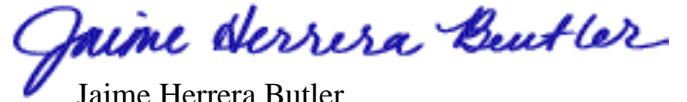
Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



Jaime Herrera Butler  
US Representative



Cliff Bentz  
US Representative