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“Let Cities Work” - LOC Announces Legislative Priorities

SALEM, Ore. – The League of Oregon Cities’ Board of Directors has set six legislative priorities for the 2019 session of the Oregon Legislature. The priorities were established through a committee process in the spring and a statewide vote of the League’s member cities. The six priorities were approved by the LOC Board Wednesday and focus on the theme, “Let Cities Work.”

Specifically, the League is requesting state investment in city solutions for systemic problems, and allowing cities to address the needs and goals of their communities with all necessary tools. The six priorities are:

1. **Mental Health Investment**
   
   While the state and Oregon’s 36 counties serve as the direct providers of mental health services, service levels have not kept pace with demands. This has resulted in cities responding to an increasing number of situations in which people are in crisis. In 2015, the Legislature invested in crisis intervention services, expansion of emergency access to care, rental assistance for mental health clients, and specialized training for police. The League asks that the Legislature recognize the power of these investments and continue to protect them through the challenging budget process in 2019.

2. **Revenue Reform/Cost Containment**
   
   The League recognizes that Oregon needs a bipartisan deal in 2019 to address the fiscal crisis at both the state and local government levels. Cost increases are simply outpacing revenues - even in a booming economy - and there is no relief in sight. Revenue reform and cost containment are needed, and for cities two items must be included in a package:

   - **Property Tax Reform:**
     The property tax system in Oregon is broken and in need of repair due to Measures 5 and 50, both of which are more than 20 years old. The League proposes that the property tax system be constitutionally and statutorily reformed to restore fairness and local choice. Adjustments should be included in efforts during the 2019 session on state and local tax reform and improving funding for schools.

   - **PERS Reform:**
     The League will seek legislation to modernize the PERS investment pool, ensure proper financial controls are adhered to, and give cities greater voice in how their monies are invested. Further, the League will advocate for legislation that calls for the risks and costs of the pension to be shared by employees, but in a manner that impacts employees through an equitable calculation.

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3. Housing/Homelessness Improvement
   Across the state, cities are looking to address housing shortages and increases in homelessness that are impacting residents. The League will advocate for: additional technical assistance that will help cities plan for affordable housing; a stronger partnership for long-term solutions to homelessness; and an increased state investment in housing development and services for the homeless.

4. Infrastructure Finance and Resilience Investment
   The League will advocate for an increase in the state’s investment in key infrastructure funding sources, including, but not limited to: the Special Public Works Fund (SPWF), the Brownfield Redevelopment Fund, and the Regionally Significant Industrial Site loan program. This advocacy will also seek an investment and set aside through the SPWF for seismic resilience planning and related infrastructure improvements to make Oregon water and wastewater systems more resilient. League research has identified a minimum of $7.6 billion in infrastructure needs for municipal water and wastewater systems in the next 20 years. Without key infrastructure investments, Oregon’s economy cannot continue to grow.

5. Right-of-Way and Franchise Fee Authority Preservation/Broadband Investment
   The League will continue to oppose any legislation that preempts local authority to manage public rights of way and cities’ ability to set the rate of compensation for the use of such rights of way. In addition, the League will seek additional state support and funding for increased and equitable broadband infrastructure deployment, especially in rural areas, while opposing any legislative efforts to restrict municipal authority to provide broadband services.

6. Third Party Building Inspection Preservation
   The League will seek to clarify the ability of local governments to continue the practice of hiring private-party building officials and building inspectors to provide services for local building inspection programs. This includes recognizing that privately-employed, specialized inspectors can perform specialized inspections.

About the League of Oregon Cities
Founded in 1925, the League of Oregon Cities is a voluntary association representing all 241 of Oregon’s incorporated cities. The League helps cities serve their citizens by providing legislative advocacy, policy consultation, networking and training, technical assistance and publications.

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