

**Written Testimony of Jack Waldorf, Executive Director  
Western Governors' Association**

**Submitted to the United States Senate  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government  
March 27, 2023**

**Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations**

Chair Van Hollen, Ranking Member Hagerty, and Members of the Subcommittee, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) appreciates the opportunity to provide written testimony on the appropriations and activities of the federal agencies under the Subcommittee's jurisdiction, including the Executive Office of the President, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), the General Services Administration (GSA), and the Small Business Administration (SBA). WGA is an independent organization representing the Governors of the 22 westernmost states and territories. The Association is an instrument of the Governors for bipartisan policy development, information sharing and collective action on issues of critical importance to the western United States.

Western Governors have policy on several issues relevant to the Subcommittee's work, including WGA Policy Resolutions 2021-02, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making; 2020-08, Broadband Connectivity; 2020-07, Rural Development; and 2022-05, Cybersecurity, that may assist the Subcommittee as it considers funding priorities for FY24.

On the subject of utilizing data for evidence-based policymaking, Western Governors applaud the Subcommittee for its inclusion of \$5 million for the General Services Administration (GSA) in the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act (Pub. L. 117-328) to support functions and activities related to the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act; Public Law 115-435). As noted in a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, (Evidence-Based Policymaking, GAO-20-119), "evidence-building activities are fragmented within...agencies and occur at multiple levels and entities within and across the agencies" and that "uncoordinated or poorly coordinated efforts can waste scarce funds and limit their effectiveness." The report went on to say that "[e]ffectively-coordinated [evidence building] processes can help agencies ensure they are comprehensively and systematically looking across their organizations to leverage their existing evidence and focus limited resources on building new evidence...Such processes can help ensure agencies are well positioned to meet forthcoming Evidence Act requirements related to assessing and prioritizing evidence across the entire agency." GAO reiterated the importance of active federal agency engagement, as "through this engagement, agencies may find that external stakeholders (and states), have, or are aware of, existing evidence that helps the agency meet its needs or provide a fuller picture of performance...[and] ensure it is meeting the evidence needs of decision makers."

Given the numerous federal agency programs, policies, and regulations that directly affect the collective states, agency coordination with states and the integration of state data into those relevant federal programs is paramount to their success. For these reasons, Western

Governors encourage the Subcommittee to direct federal agencies to improve their internal processes required in the Evidence Act to coordinate with states on federal data policies and procedures and incorporate state data into federal decision-making processes. Western Governors also support full and consistent federal funding to carry out the requirements of this critical legislation and ensure that agencies have the capacity and resources required to fulfill GAO's evidence-based policymaking recommendations.

In addition, Western Governors are pleased by the funding allocated in the FY23 Consolidated Appropriations Act for the Office of the National Cyber Director to support the coordination and implementation of national cybersecurity policy and strategy. Western Governors urge the Subcommittee to continue to provide appropriations for the Office commensurate with the importance of its position in leading federal cybersecurity coordination efforts. Strong cybersecurity is especially essential for the nation's critical infrastructure, which includes election systems. State election systems remain targets of foreign interference, a matter that is a threat to our democracy. The federal government has a responsibility to help states combat this threat and provide adequate funding for states to fully meet election security needs.

Deployment of federal funding and broadband infrastructure to underserved and unserved communities requires an accurate picture of nationwide broadband availability. Western Governors recognize the Subcommittee's commitment to funding implementation of the Broadband Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability Act (Pub. L. 116-130), and recommend continued investment in mapping efforts. Western Governors also encourage the coordination of data collection strategies among the FCC, the US Department of Agriculture, and other agencies involved in broadband mapping and deployment.

Many western communities, especially rural and tribal communities, lack access to broadband internet due to the high cost of infrastructure and the economic challenges of serving low customer densities in rural areas. When communities do have access to broadband, download and upload speeds are often insufficient to meet bandwidth demands. These realities have left many rural businesses at a competitive disadvantage and citizens without access to telework, telemedicine, and distance learning opportunities. Consequently, Western Governors support efforts to adopt a federal definition of broadband that is higher and more scalable than 25/3 Mbps and recommend that the Subcommittee leverage state expertise through state block grants and explore opportunities to improve connectivity on rural and tribal lands. To ensure that tribal areas receive adequate investment, federal broadband programs should allocate a designated portion of their available funding to tribal projects.

Western Governors acknowledge report language included in FY23 appropriations (H. Rpt. 117-395) directing the FCC to evaluate new or existing programs that could be used to permanently extend telecommunications and information services to students at locations other than schools and libraries. The Governors approve of efforts to promote flexibility within the FCC's E-Rate Program to deliver home connectivity solutions for unserved and underserved students and call for the Subcommittee's support of bus wi-fi and other creative approaches to address the homework gap.

Finally, the SBA plays a fundamental role in rural economic development. Small businesses are the foundation of rural economies, generating tax revenue, creating jobs, providing essential goods and services, and contributing to the culture and character of small towns. Building a successful business in a rural community is particularly challenging due to limited access to capital, available workforce and smaller customer bases. Western Governors recommend support for small businesses and entrepreneurs; sufficient and accessible business stabilization funds, including grants and long-term, forgivable loans to address periods of disruption resulting from disasters; and an increase in the proportion of economic development funding that goes toward technical assistance and capacity building.

Western Governors recognize that it is an enormous challenge to judiciously balance competing funding needs throughout the federal government. The Governors appreciate the difficulty of the decisions you must make and stand ready to work with you in discharging these important matters.