

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

**Submitted to the United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
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Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations

Chair Shaheen, Ranking Member Moran, and Members of the Subcommittee, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony on items within the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, including the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and National Science Foundation (NSF). 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 underscore the importance of a close and productive working relationship between states, territories, and the federal government and understand that more effective cooperation depends on federal recognition of states as co-sovereigns and partners. The promotion of greater partnership between states and the federal government is central to the mission of WGA and is reflected in the Governors' Policy Resolution 2024-01, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship. Given the numerous federal programs, policies, and regulations directly affecting states and territories, Western Governors encourage the Subcommittee to direct Congress and federal agencies to improve their internal processes and coordinate with states and territories on federal policies and procedures, as well as integrate state and territorial data into federal programs, including for policymaking purposes.

WGA also commends your attention to other Western Governors' resolutions that articulate policy positions relevant to the Subcommittee's work. These include Policy Resolutions 2023-06, Rural Development; 2023-07, Broadband Connectivity; 2022-05, Cybersecurity; 2023-09, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons; 2024-04, Combating the Opioid Crisis; and 2021-08, Water Resource Management in the West.

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) plays a critical role in rural economic development. Communities across the West are envisioning transformative and systems-wide solutions to meet their unique needs, and EDA should be responsive to these community-led approaches. Western Governors urge increased flexibility in the allowable uses of EDA funds so that rural communities can prioritize the investments that work best for them.

Western Governors recommend an increase in the proportion of economic development and infrastructure funding that goes toward capacity building, and Congress should allow EDA to negotiate the percentage of financial versus technical assistance within appropriations.

Strengthening local capacity by providing ample and consistent federal funding for institutions, training, and technical assistance is essential to maximize the effect of state and federal resources and ensure that assistance reaches the communities that need it most. The Governors believe that assessment metrics based solely on the absolute number of jobs created do not reflect the important economic benefits of investments in community assets that improve quality of life and amenities and make rural communities attractive places to live, nor do they account for the relative effect of job creation in small communities or areas with high unemployment or poverty rates.

Western Governors note that shifts in our economy, labor force, and technology require fundamental changes and new economic development strategies. They request that the Subcommittee support small businesses and entrepreneurs; education and training that can be tailored to the needs of rural communities; economic diversification; and tax incentives, grants, and other financial incentives to spur innovation and attract businesses and manufacturing enterprises to rural areas. Western Governors are supportive of efforts to facilitate improved coordination across agencies and streamlined, one-stop application processes for rural customers.

Many western communities, especially rural and tribal communities, do not have 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 or individuals lack the skills, technology, or capacity to reap the benefits of our digital economy. Such realities have left many rural businesses at a competitive disadvantage and citizens without telework, telemedicine, and distance learning opportunities. Western Governors look forward to addressing this digital divide by implementing the significant broadband funding allocated to states through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's (IIJA; Pub. L. 117-58) Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program; State Digital Equity Planning Grants; and Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program.

Despite this progress, Western Governors emphasize the need for continued federal investment to close connectivity gaps and backfill IIJA funding. Western Governors urge Congress to consider additional funding for broadband deployment, including innovative and flexible ways to repurpose existing resources in alignment with state and territorial BEAD plans, and call on the Subcommittee to identify and invest in unmet and ongoing digital equity needs after funds are expended in 2026. In addition, the Subcommittee should support fiscal opportunities to improve broadband connectivity on tribal lands.

Cybersecurity is another priority of Western Governors. The increasing complexity and frequency of cyber threats pose significant risks to states and territories, economic stability, and national security. Countering these threats effectively requires a well-trained and experienced cybersecurity workforce. Therefore, Western Governors request long-term and sufficient funding for developing and expanding high-quality cybersecurity education and workforce development programs. These programs should include efforts to target underrepresented populations, retain personnel through rotations, and increase work-based learning opportunities. The Subcommittee should expand the CyberCorps: Scholarship for Service Program and provide continued support to educational initiatives, such as the National Institute of Standards and

Technology's (NIST) National Initiative for Cybersecurity Education and National Centers of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense.

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) crisis continues to deeply affect western communities. Western Governors recommend that the Subcommittee provide ample funding for tribal courts and justice systems to ensure communities have the tools to address these crimes.

Western Governors acknowledge the outsized harm caused by the opioid epidemic, which has become increasingly lethal and devastating to public health and safety. Reducing the epidemic's effects involves stemming the supply of illegally produced opioids and limiting inappropriate and nonmedical uses of prescription opioids. Western Governors urge the Subcommittee to continue financially supporting state interdiction activities. The Governors appreciate past allocations to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to reimburse states for cleaning up and safely disposing of illegal substances.

Western Governors believe that the Subcommittee should expand opportunities for early intervention and law enforcement diversion, including community reentry programs and resources and training for law enforcement and emergency service providers, to prevent entry into the justice system for individuals with behavioral health conditions. Western Governors also call for designations to enhance access to harm reduction strategies at low costs for both teens and adults.

Opioid education and awareness campaigns, such as those managed by DEA, are necessary tools to foster public dialogue and mobilize action across communities. The Subcommittee should support DEA in further developing its campaigns and dedicate funding to states and territories for targeted and culturally specific opioid awareness and education efforts, especially efforts focused on youth awareness and education, which are complementary to those at the federal level.

Finally, western states rely on basic information on the status, trends, and projections of water resource availability to make sound water management decisions. This information allows water users throughout the West and decision makers at all levels of government to assess drought conditions and respond effectively with drought mitigation measures to reduce the risk of wildfires, ecosystem impairments, agricultural production loss, and degradation of municipal and industrial water supplies.

For these reasons, Western Governors support strong and dedicated funding for the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which performs a valuable role in western water management and drought response. Western Governors also support federal programs dedicated to the improvement of data on snowpack, streamflow, soil moisture, and forecasting, including the NASA National Land Imaging (Landsat) Program, and federal efforts to coordinate water data gathering and information programs across multiple agencies. Western Governors recognize the need for improved predictive capabilities for extreme weather variability and urge

the Subcommittee to place a priority on improving the sub-seasonal and seasonal precipitation forecasting capabilities that could facilitate water management decision making.

Western Governors recognize the enormous challenge you have in balancing competing funding priorities, and we appreciate the difficulty of the decisions the Subcommittee must make. These recommendations are offered in a spirit of cooperation and respect, and WGA is prepared to assist you as the Subcommittee discharges its critical and challenging responsibilities.