

April 2, 2019

Representative Nancy Nathanson, Chair
Representative Lynn Findley, Vice-Chair
Representative Pam Marsh, Vice Chair
House Committee on Revenue
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE,
Hearing Room A
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: EducationSuperHighway Testimony in Support of House Bill 2184

Dear Chair Nathanson and Vice-Chairs Findley and Marsh:

EducationSuperHighway is America's leading non-profit focused on upgrading the Internet access in every public school classroom in the United States. We believe that digital learning represents an unprecedented opportunity to provide every student with equal access to educational opportunity and that every school requires high speed broadband to make that opportunity a reality.

Over the last seven years, our work has made K-12 broadband infrastructure a national priority at both the federal and state level. In 2013, the President launched the ConnectED program to bring high speed broadband to every classroom and a year later the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) increased funding for K-12 broadband by \$2.5 billion per year. These actions were followed by tremendous support for connecting schools at the state level. As of today, 49 Governors, including Oregon Governor Brown, have publicly committed to upgrading their schools for the 21st century. As a result, 40 million more students have access to sufficient connectivity in their classrooms than in 2014 and 98% of schools now have high-speed fiber optic connections.

In the context of this national effort to upgrade America's K-12 broadband infrastructure, I write to support House Bill 2184. EducationSuperHighway's work with states has shown that the path to ensuring all students have access to digital learning must start with connecting every school to scalable high-speed broadband infrastructure – either a fiber optic cable or a modern, high-capacity microwave connection. As of today, nearly 50 Oregon schools lack these connections and without the support of House Bill 2184 will be unable to obtain this critical infrastructure.

Our work in Oregon shows the importance of infrastructure upgrades to unlock the potential of digital learning. In 2014-15, EducationSuperHighway conducted a pilot project with Sauvie Island Academy, a remote rural school district of about 200 students suffering from inadequate connectivity delivered via 1960's-era T-1 circuits that seriously impacted their curricular activities. By working with the district leadership and reaching out to local providers, EducationSuperHighway helped to connect Sauvie Island to a modern, high-capacity microwave connection that resulted in an eleven-fold increase in bandwidth for 1/27th of the cost of their previous connection. This unlocked new learning opportunities for the students on Sauvie Island

and became the basis for the technical support program we have replicated with great success across the country.

Since 2016, we have worked with the Oregon Department of Education, Educational Service Districts, and directly with districts to assist and support them in their pursuit of upgraded broadband infrastructure. Our support has included providing pricing transparency tools such as Compare and Connect K12; working directly with district and ESD's on bid materials to ensure they are positioned for maximum success; and sharing strategies and best practices learned from our work across the country.

Together we worked to develop a State Match Fund Plan which culminated in the establishment of the Connecting Oregon Schools Fund in 2018. This fund enabled Oregon schools to access additional subsidies from the federal E-rate program for the construction of high speed broadband infrastructure. An initial \$600,000 of state funds were made available through the Connecting Oregon Schools Fund helping 9 Districts upgrade their broadband infrastructure and access approximately \$6 million of total federal funds.

HB 2184 represents a critical step the Legislative Assembly is taking to advance broadband upgrades in Oregon schools. By expanding the definition of "retail telecommunications service", establishing the Broadband Fund and authorizing rulemaking authority to make grants or loans "for the purpose of providing broadband access to schools...[including] procedures for transferring funds from the Broadband Fund to the Connecting Oregon Schools Fund... "; additional state resources can be made available to continue to leverage the federal e-rate program. Without HB 2184, too many Oregon students will be left on the wrong side of the digital divide waiting for their future to download.

HB 2184 provides the framework for continued public school broadband upgraded success into the 21st Century. It is without hesitation that EducationSuperHighway supports enactment of the proposed legislation.

Sincerely,

/s/ Evan Marwell

Evan Marwell
Founder and CEO
EducationSuperHighway