



Including everyone in our digital future.

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Chair Holvey and Members of the House Committee On Business and Labor:

My name is Hilary Shohoney and I am the Executive Director of Free Geek in Portland. Free Geek is a nonprofit organization that takes donated, used technology, repairs and refurbishes it, and provides it back to the community at low or no cost. Our goal is to include everyone in our digital future by providing access to technology devices, as well as other services, to people who otherwise are unable to afford them.

I'm here to testify on the critical importance of House Bill 2698 to Oregon's communities.

Why does Free Geek care about House Bill 2698 (Right to Repair)? Because it will help Free Geek in the mission of closing the digital divide. The digital divide is the gap between people who have a personal computer, broadband internet, and digital skills—and those who don't. This divide affects many people: children, rural families, people with disabilities, recently arrived refugees, seniors—the list goes on.

Free Geek provides devices and digital skills training to our vulnerable community members. That includes Colleen, a young woman who escaped an abusive relationship and wound up houseless for a time before using her Free Geek laptop to get a job and back on her feet. Monica, a single mother of 4 currently living in a hotel room after she lost her home to a wildfire, is using her Free Geek computer to continue to pursue a career as a Medical Assistant. We worked with MyNeighbor Oregon to provide technology to students in foster care who needed access to a laptop to connect with case workers, biological families and for their studies.

Technology has long been essential, but the pandemic has laid the inequities in digital access bare. COVID-19 has shown us the need for access to technology like we have never seen it before creating an exponential increase in requests for devices over the last year. Currently just 2 of our programs have over 1000 outstanding applications for computers.

So, what does this have to do with Right to Repair? Currently, Free Geek must reverse-engineer every new type of device that we receive. Through this process, we often break devices in order to understand them. It's not logical, it's unnecessarily challenging, and it's simply a waste of resources. Many devices are being recycled simply because we do not have access to the parts needed to repair them.

By contrast, Right to Repair helps Free Geek in closing the digital divide, as it allows us to do our work as a technology refurbisher more effectively. Free Geek is diligent: We have a rigorous testing and quality assurance process. But we're repairing and servicing technology with no manual. Right to Repair will help us save time and costs as a nonprofit making the most of the limited resources our community entrusts to us. It will also help Free Geek source parts.

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We have closets of useable computers without the right battery. We're just waiting to give these devices to those in our community that need them most. The barrier? It's incredibly difficult and expensive to source the right battery. Right to Repair would solve this challenge for us.

The passage of this bill would enable us to have access to tools, parts, and schematics so that we do not have to wait weeks for a specialized screwdriver to come in. We won't have to reverse engineer a machine to figure out how to repair it.

Right now we're attending this hearing remotely, but thousands of members of our community are unable to be here. By voting yes on HB 2698 you'll be making it possible for more Oregonians to participate in society and the institution we call democracy.

Thank you for this opportunity.  
Hilary Shohoney