



Sharon Meieran
Multnomah County Commissioner, District 1

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February 21, 2023

Representative Janelle Bynum, Chair
House Committee on Economic Development and Small Business
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Multnomah County Support for [HB 3201](#)

Dear Chair Bynum, Vice-Chairs Morgan and Nguyen, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Sharon Meieran. I am a Multnomah County Commissioner and I am speaking today in strong support of HB 3201.

People tend to think of downtown Portland as “Multnomah County,” but in reality we have areas of extreme poverty. My district in the west and District 4 in the east include rural unincorporated areas with forests, homes scattered far from one another, and lack of basic infrastructure.

I will speak briefly to the need for universal access to reliable high speed internet as a utility, the problems we face in getting to this goal in Oregon, and why HB 3201 is the right solution.

It was clear before the pandemic, and was highlighted over the past three years: We require meaningful access to reliable high speed internet not only to thrive, but to function. This is especially true for marginalized and underserved communities- those who are low income, communities of color, elderly, youth, residents of rural areas - who too often have no meaningful internet access at all.

In 2019, I sponsored a study that examined the feasibility of a publicly-owned, regional high speed internet network in Multnomah County. The study validated the need, and highlighted the areas in Multnomah County where there was literally no access even if one could afford it.

The County has pursued some approaches that are bandaids, but they don't solve the underlying problem. If we want Oregon's residents and businesses to thrive, we need to build and support the infrastructure that treats access to reliable high speed internet as a utility. With any utility, part of the problem is dominance of a monopoly type power by organizations whose only motivation is profit. This can't work for water or access to heat. And it can't work for access to high speed reliable internet.



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Currently, the existing statute threatens Oregon's ability to access hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funds intended to increase broadband availability and digital equity. Current statute includes completely outdated technology standards. There is a lack of flexibility that prevents broadband and digital equity funding from being spent efficiently and effectively. And something that is creates a stranglehold of a few companies that can charge whatever they want for internet service - "right of first refusal" which is not only unnecessary but anti-competitive.

HB 3201 addresses all of these challenges and allows us to leverage historical federal funding to improve broadband infrastructure, affordability and adoption in our state. I urge you to pass HB 3201 with the forthcoming -1 amendment and thank you for your attention to this hugely important issue.

Sincerely,

Sharon Meieran, MD, JD
Multnomah County Commissioner, District 1