

To: Economic and Small Business Committee

From: Free Geek

**Re: Testimony in Support of HB 3201-1 Aligning Statute to Maximize Federal Broadband Funding**

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

Free Geek is a digital equity organization in Portland, Oregon. Free Geek's mission is to sustainably reuse technology, enable digital access and provide education to create a community that empowers people to realize their potential. Our Vision: Including Everyone in Our Digital Future.

For 23 years Free Geek has provided low or no cost technology hardware, digital literacy and access to internet services to Oregon families and individuals. Over the peak of the pandemic we delivered 4,258 computers and connected 5,380 individuals with support services. These individuals all fell 200% below the federal poverty line, were from Black, Brown and other communities of color, were wildfire victims, students from K-12 Title 1 schools and survivors of domestic violence.

Free Geek partnered with the Oregon Employment Department SNAP Program, WorkSource Oregon, Community Based Organizations, Multnomah County and with the City of Portland to support disconnected families with the following:

- Free Technology Hardware
- Digital Literacy and Digital Navigation Services
- Affordable Connectivity Program Sign Ups
- Hotspot Distribution
- Career or Education Development Plans

Of the close to 10,000 people and families we reached 72% lived in urban cities, 28% lived in rural communities with 60% living in the Portland Metro Area.

Through a combination of surveys, focus groups and interviews we learned that 59% had no internet service and 41% had some access to the internet. Those with internet access shared mobile hotspot, had slow internet connection, used public libraries, community colleges or retail stores with wifi to connect to the internet.

I'd like to share one of our recipient stories. Ariana came to Free Geek and WorkSource Oregon as a referral from a case manager at a Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title 1 Partner in East Portland. Her long term goal was to work full time in health care.

She was using her cell phone to complete her school work and attend online classes for her program. By being a part of Free Geek's digital inclusion service program, she gained access to a laptop and hotspot that allowed her to view her coursework better and participate in online classes more easily.

*As she attends school, she is looking for part-time employment or work experience that will help her make connections in the medical field. Now that she has a laptop and internet access, she will be able to attend virtual job seeker workshops with WorkSource Oregon, which will help her learn valuable skills for obtaining a job in her desired field.*



## **SNAP Program Meet the Participants**

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### **Meet Ariana**



*Ariana is one of thousands of Oregonians who do not have adequate access to the internet or technology hardware in our urban cities. Free Geek supports HB 3201 because as a front line digital equity practitioner we know what's at stake for our community members living in some of our poorest urban neighborhoods and rural communities.*

*Thank you.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Juan Manuel Muro, Jr.", written over a large, stylized circular flourish.

*Juan Manuel Muro, Jr.  
Executive Director, Free Geek*