



Oregon Citizens' Utility Board

610 SW Broadway, Suite 400
Portland, OR 97205

(503) 227-1984
www.oregoncub.org

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Re: HB 4155 -4

Testimony Before House Committee on Rules

Good Afternoon. Chair Williamson, Vice Chairs McLane and Rayfield, members of the Committee - My name is Samuel Pastrick. I'm here today on behalf of Oregon Citizens' Utility Board, or CUB, to encourage your support for HB 4155 with the -4 amendment.

Before I speak any further, I do want to take just a moment to highlight 4155-A, which sought to remedy a very serious consumer issue - and that is digital privacy on the customer end. While CUB understands the merit of emphasizing net neutrality during the short legislative session, we anticipate and are planning continued work on the growing privacy issue facing Oregon Internet customers heading into 2019.

I'll now go ahead and address the -4.

The Internet, while certainly not regulated as such, is an essential utility service. And what this means is that everyone, especially in this day and age, is entitled to fair, unencumbered, and affordable service. This, in a nutshell, is the idea behind the "Open Internet" or - as it's now more commonly referred to - "net neutrality".

CUB has endorsed neutral networks for many years. In fact, one of Oregon's lesser known claims-to-fair is having given rise to the national debate around net neutrality dating back to the 90's.

But it wasn't until 2015 when the Federal Communications Commission approved the Open Internet Order that the federal government finally codified rules based on strong legal footing. To be clear, this process took several years. And despite repeated attempts to appeal the decision from cable and telephone industry groups, the courts stood firm in defense of those rules.

However, as we all know by now, in December of last year, the FCC decisively rolled back their own Open Internet rules and replaced them with - well - nothing at all.

This decision created a serious consumer protection void. Among efforts from several other state Attorneys General and legislatures, Oregon now has a special opportunity to fill this void.

I want to lay out what's at stake by offering specific examples.

Ernesto highlighted a useful example in defense of net neutrality - the Internet-reliant startup vying to enter a competitive market.

I'm, however, a customer advocate, so want to offer two different examples:

The first is the student needing home internet access to complete their homework, in let's say Joseph or Estacada. That student, I think we all agree, is entitled to the same speed and access to content as the corporate CEO in a downtown Portland high rise.

But one other example, I think, highlights why folks nowadays - especially those who are most vulnerable - need safe, reliable, and affordable Internet access.

Let's say I'm homebound - for any reason and for any period of time. In this scenario, the Internet is my connection to the outside world. It's my vehicle to connect with friends and family. It's my entertainment outlet. It's my way to receive essential medical service - whether that's scheduling appointments, reviewing lab results, or even receiving the actual care. The Internet may also be my best or only means to order food, or find extra help around the house. If I'm employed, It's my vehicle to keep that job by working remotely. If I'm unemployed, it's my only option to look for and apply to a new job.

This is what's at stake.

The Internet, in the scenario I just described, is the foundation of my health and my safety, general well being, and ability to participate in society in a meaningful way.

So were we to agree on this point - that fair and affordable access to the Internet can make or break someone's livelihood - then we should also agree that the -4 amendment is not only a just and reasonable approach to enforcing network neutrality, it's good public policy for the benefit Oregonians.

So again, on behalf of CUB, I want to encourage the Committee's support for House Bill 4155 with the -4 amendment. Thanks for your time, and I'm of course happy to answer any questions.

Samuel Pastrick
Consumer Advocate and Membership Manager
Oregon Citizens' Utility Board