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June 24, 2020

Chair Senator Peter Courtney
Chair Representative Tina Kotek
Joint Interim Committee on the First Special Session of 2020
State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Sent via electronic mail to j1ss.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Re: Support for SB 1603 - Rural Broadband

Dear Chairs Courtney and Kotek and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 1603. 1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit membership organization that has worked with Oregonians for more than 40 years to support livable urban and rural communities; protect family farms, forests, and natural areas; and provide transportation and housing choice.

SB 1603 supports economic development in rural Oregon by providing capacity to access and expand broadband infrastructure and services. Business Oregon currently oversees the state's Regional Solutions program, in which the state is divided into 11 regions, each of which, among other things, is charged with locally determining their priorities for economic development. Six of those 11 have concluded that broadband investment is necessary for communities to thrive.

SB 1603 is responsive to this need, by creating the Oregon Broadband Office within Business Oregon, and directing it to take action to close the existing digital divide, by focusing on unserved and underserved communities that lack broadband infrastructure. SB 1603 expands the Oregon Universal Service Fund to stabilize the existing fund and create a new Broadband Fund. Taking action to stabilize and expand telecommunications is a high priority during a pandemic that has exposed significant digital gaps and spurred the divide between those access and afford these vital services, and those who cannot.

Thank you,
Scott Hilgenberg
Rural Lands Legislative Attorney