



City of Portland

Office for Community Technology

▲ Broadband & Communications Policy

▲ Cable Regulation & Consumer Protection

▲ Utility Franchises, Licenses & Wireless

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Senator Chuck Riley, Chair
Senate Labor and Business Committee
900 Court Street NE, HR B
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Riley and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share the City of Portland's enthusiastic support of SB 615 which establishes the Low Income Broadband Bill Payment Assistance Fund to provide broadband bill payment assistance to low income households.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that Broadband to the home is a necessity in the same way that electricity and water are essential for communities to live and thrive. The City of Portland appreciates the Federal Government's efforts through the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program to provide direct payments to companies on behalf of customers. While this is a great solution in the short-term, low-income households will need ongoing assistance until a long-term solution is identified to address the broadband affordability barrier.

The City prioritized responding to the digital access needs of underserved Portland residents with CARES Act funds. \$5 million in CARES Act funding provided computing devices, digital literacy training, and internet service assistance to residents struggling to stay connected. Through this funding 8,429 Visa cards, each with \$356 dollars, were provided to low income residents to help cover the monthly cost of internet service of their choosing.

While the City recognizes the need for public assistance to keep vulnerable residents connected to the internet, the City's ability to fund such assistance must compete with other critical City services such as housing and food assistance. For this reason, the City supports establishing public policy that helps to sustain assistance programs.

Efforts are underway at every level of government and across multiple sectors to meet the real time needs of low-income individuals and households. The City of Portland stands ready to partner with our state and federal colleagues to strategize a coordinated plan to meet the connectivity and training needs of Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and people living with disabilities to ensure that access to and use of technology is not a barrier to long term opportunity and wealth creation.

Thank you,

Elisabeth H. Perez
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Interim Director, City of Portland Office for Community Technology