February 9, 2021

RE: Testimony in support of HB 2570, House Committee on Education

Chair Alonso Leon, members of the committee:

On behalf of our organizations, thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important topic. Businesses across the state value Oregon's public education system and support efforts that increase equitable access to skill development that will serve learners well as they transition from school to career. Under this principle, we offer our strong support for HB 2570.

Computer science, and digital literacy in general, has been identified by large and small businesses across sectors as an increasingly important skill in our dynamic workforce. Many of our state's emerging industries already require entry-level employees to possess some form of digital fluency. In fact, jobs in these fields are consistently higher wage and in higher demand both in Oregon and throughout the country. Employment in computer and information technology is expected to grow 11% between 2019-2029. Roughly 67% of all new jobs in STEM are in computing fields with an average salary of $89,697.

We also know that these fields have traditionally lacked diverse representation, which has impacted our historically underserved students the most. This bill will work to dismantle those systemic barriers and provide a detailed, structured support for districts that ensures all students have access to the skill development they need to be successful upon graduation. When all Oregon's students are better equipped to enter our workforce the economic benefits are magnified.

We are pleased to see the bill's collaboration between the Department of Education and the expertise of industry leaders through the STEM Investment Council, which is responsible for recommending the state's STEM Education Plan to the Department of Education and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Digital literacy is a core part of STEM education and thus a priority focus of the Council.

We are eager to participate in and support the work group, created by HB 2570, to develop a statewide computer science education plan that equitably improves student outcomes in digital literacy.

Sincerely,

Morgan Beltz, Oregon Business & Industry
Kyle Ritchey-Noll, Oregon Business Council
Stefan Bird, Chair, Oregon CTE-STEM Employer Coalition