

House Committee on Economic Development and Small Business
Testimony on HB3201, HB3249 and HB2766
Russell Senior
Relating to the Hearing on 2023-02-21

My name is Russell Senior. I am President of a volunteer-based non-profit in Portland, Oregon called the Personal Telco Project. For 20 years we have been building and maintaining public-access wifi networks providing free internet access and advocating for centering users in telecommunications policy.

I support HB3201. I opposed HB3249. I also think that if Industry wants a study of obstacles to deployment, they should fund and conduct it themselves, so I oppose HB2766.

Telecommunication policy in this country, since 1996, relies on competition to protect the consumer, competition, which, for the most part has never arrived. The vigorous “competition” the incumbents claim exists is largely a fantasy. The struggle they perceive is their victims trying to wriggle out of their clutches.

The large public investment required now is proof that the Industry-favored model of facilities-based competition has been a failure.

Nowhere that requires a public subsidy to build infrastructure will EVER get an unsubsidized competitor.

If public funds are granted to a private carrier, with no ongoing requirement to serve the public interest, the State would be complicit in building that carrier a private cash machine that they will exploit for their private interests. Grants to private providers will BUILD entrenched monopolies in those communities.

Public investments should serve the public interest. These federal grant programs are supposed to benefit the public, not build private cash machines that exploit peoples need for telecommunication.

Therefore, if there is to be any hope of an enduring public benefit from these “once in a lifetime” investments, these grants should leave ownership of the infrastructure constructed with these funds in the hands of those with a fiduciary duty to the people that infrastructure serves.

Requiring these public funds to only go to Telecommunications Services (denying funds for mere Information Services, see the Scalia opinion in the Brand X decision), requiring line sharing, could be a reasonable compromise in so far as it would preserve a way for competitive providers to emerge.

Thank you.