

Submitter: Michelle Thurston

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1576

February 4, 2026

Oregon State Legislature

Senate Committee on Housing and Development

RE: Support for SB 1523 (Bridging the Digital Divide)

Chair Pham, Vice Chair Anderson, and members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development:

My name is Michelle Thurston, and I live in a senior and disabled community in Cottage Grove. When I heard about SB 1523, I was filled with hope and relief, I know firsthand how devastating it can be when the simple acts of paying rent, filling out applications, or communication with property managers become impossible due to the loss of accessible options. Especially for so many of my neighbors, fellow seniors and disabled residents who already face so many barriers. For those of us living in rural and coastal areas, these challenges can feel even more overwhelming and isolating. I believe this legislation can make a real difference, assuring dignity, independence, and a connection to those who need it most.

The digital way of life has really taken hold of just about every aspect of our everyday lives. While yes, that is positive. It really does leave many people out of touch. For example. In my community there is only one option for an internet carrier, and the cost is a staggering \$100 a month. That cost on a person who lives on a fixed income and is currently struggling with "do I buy my medication or food"? While smart phones are easily available, they too are not only costly devices but also require a financial burden in the form of a monthly subscription. If we put aside the financial impact. We have the fact that technology is changing daily, with upgrades, and new improved websites, which again is great, but we cannot look past those who are unable to navigate or educate themselves on technology enough to trust it. Every day we receive information on some new scam that focuses on our vulnerable communities.

I have heard the argument that. "Well, those people can go to the library, community center or senior and disabled and use their computers." Those are great ideas, and for many, that may be a great option, but for many without transportation, who are medically fragile or live in a rural/coastal community, those options are not always available.

So, taking the simple step to make sure the residents of Oregon can apply for,

communicate with and pay their rent in person, by hard copy or check is crucial.

Sometimes our need for progress comes at the expense of those the progress is trying to help. It is okay to slow down and adjust progress.

Sincerely,

Michelle Thurston
Cottage Grove, Oregon