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I am Rep. Tim O'Brien of the Twenty-Fourth District and I would like to testify in support of H.B. No. 5299 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING COMPUTER SOFTWARE PURCHASED BY STATE AGENCIES.

This legislation is intended to require state agencies to consider the use of open source software when they are considering the purchase of proprietary software. The purpose is for agencies to consider the costs and benefits of downloading free open source software instead of buying proprietary software. I think that this legislation could save the state a considerable amount of money.

What "open source" means is computer software that is not owned by anyone. It has been placed by its creators into the public domain, where anyone can read, experiment with and change it. And, usually, it can be downloaded for free on the Internet. You can often donate to the organizations and individuals who create and maintain open source software, and I have, but it is not generally required.

Of course, open source is the opposite of "proprietary" software, which is owned by a person or corporation under copyright. Most of the software you are probably familiar with is proprietary, and usually proprietary software must be purchased from a vendor, at potentially great cost.

The first advantage of open source software is the cost of acquiring it. It is certainly hard to beat a price of \$0. But there are other advantages. Since open source software is not restricted by copyright, like proprietary software, if your business or, in our case, state agency, has information technology professionals on staff, they can customize the software to the needs of the agency without having to either create new software from scratch, at great cost, or accept the inflexibility of having to accept what "out of the box" proprietary software can or cannot do.

In the case of many open sourced software, there are businesses that offer customer support, for a fee, to people using open source software. But, to be sure, one of the advantages of proprietary software is that there is more likely to be customer support available from the owner of the software copyright. This means that open source will be best suited for state agencies with IT professionals on staff, who will be capable of locating, online, discussion of how the programs work and how to correct problems.

Another advantage of proprietary software is that, in terms of technical innovation, they are typically a step or two ahead of their open source alternatives. But this is not always true. I believe that the Mozilla Firefox Internet browser is better in quality than the Microsoft Internet Explorer.

You might think that it is hard to find open source software, since it might seem counterintuitive that someone would go through the trouble of creating a software package and then give it away for free. But the number of open source applications available is staggering.

This website has links to many of the better programs available:

<http://www.opensourcewindows.org/>

Most open source downloads that I have seen seem to go through the company that runs this website:

<http://sourceforge.net/>

In fact, I wrote this testimony on an open source program called "OpenOffice.org", which serves a similar function as the Microsoft Office suite.

It is important to note that this legislation would not require state agencies to use open source software. It only requires them make some modicum of cost and benefits comparison before spending taxpayer money, needlessly, when a free or low cost alternative can be simply downloaded from the Internet.

Thank-you for your consideration.