

# BUCKEYE HILLS regional council

**Bret Allphin, Development Director - Buckeye Hills Regional Council**  
**House Bill 378: Ohio Broadband Development Grant Program: Ohio House Finance Committee**

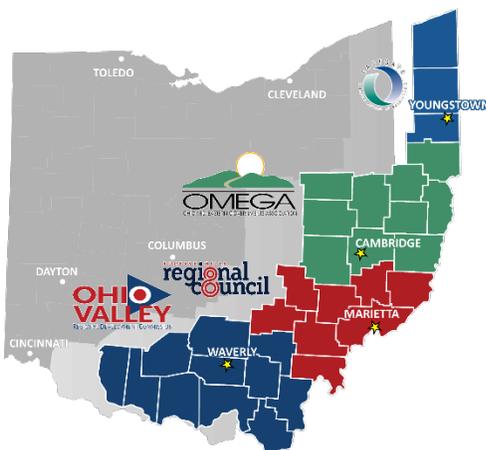
**Dec. 7, 2017**

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present this interested party written testimony on the proposed House Bill 378 – Ohio Broadband Development Grant Program.

My name is Bret Allphin and I serve as the Development Director for the Buckeye Hills Regional Council (Buckeye Hills). Our organization serves eight counties in the Appalachian portion of southeastern Ohio. As a regional council of governments, our purpose is to provide services to local county and municipal governments.

Research from The Ohio State University Swank Program in Rural-Urban Policy indicates that more than one million Ohioans still lack access to fast, reliable broadband services in their homes.<sup>i</sup> This underserved population largely lives in less populated rural regions like ours. They continue to experience digital isolation due to their geographic location.

As Representative Jack Cera testified, we echo to you that there are still communities in Appalachia that have zero options for broadband service. In fact, there is a current gap of 30 percentage points – only 52.8% of households in Appalachia have access to the FCC benchmark broadband speeds (compared to 82.9% statewide).<sup>ii</sup>



In an area larger than the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode-Island combined, Ohio's Appalachian region is "home" to 17 percent of the state's residents.<sup>iii</sup>

It is expensive for internet service providers to extend service in these rural areas, but no less critical to Ohioans' daily lives for education, business, health care and more. This obviously puts the greater region at a disadvantage. In rural areas, research suggests that broadband can be an effective economic development tool.

Ohio State University's research shows that bridging the broadband divide and extending access to under-served areas of the state like ours will require a focused state effort. This legislation would provide critical last dollar support to encourage vital broadband investment and infrastructure expansion in Ohio's vast unserved areas.

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**Broadband is no longer a luxury, it is a necessity.**

Portions of our region are in the heart of the economic development growth areas above the Marcellus and Utica Shale regions. We are experiencing tremendous growth and change. Yet some commercial sites in the play still have no or limited access to commercial broadband services.

There are an estimated 88,500 Ohio businesses with no broadband access. Ohio's businesses need broadband to grow and to compete in a global marketplace.

Ohio's children and non-traditional learners also need broadband to excel in school and to advance their education and career pathways. At a time when national data indicates that the great majority of jobs (65-70%) require some postsecondary education and training beyond high school, while a full 35% require a bachelor's degree and beyond<sup>iv</sup>, only 15.9% of Ohio's Appalachia residents have a bachelor's degree, lagging behind the state (25.2% with degrees). Increased access to broadband for online education is critical, especially considering that access to in-county higher education courses in some Appalachian counties remains limited.

Broadband is also a critical tool for the unemployed. As Ohio has invested in the development of Ohio Means Jobs for job listings and support services to the unemployed, it is increasingly more important for job seekers to have internet access at home. Limitations in access to broadband also limits work from home opportunities.

Buckeye Hills Regional Council is an Appalachian local development district working with the federal Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and with Ohio's Development Services Agency and its Ohio Governor's Office of Appalachia. Other Ohio LDD agencies include the Eastgate Regional Council of Governments, the Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association and the Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission

Since 1968, Buckeye Hills has been a voice for the residents across rural Southeast Ohio. We are determined to improve conditions in our region and to provide residents the resources and services needed to build their communities and reach parity with the nation.

The expansion of access to broadband services to all Appalachian Ohioans will continue to leverage support provided by the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Ohio Governor's Office of Appalachia. As a local development district, we are poised and at the ready to assist local entities in accessing the Ohio Broadband Development Grant Program for the greatest regional impact. We also stand ready to assist the Development Services Agency in rolling this new program out across the region.

It is our desire to see these grants awarded to applicants that best address community needs, including providing technical support and digital literacy training, with special emphasis on unserved, vital community institutions like schools, police and fire, and hospitals.

In order to effectively foster business establishment and growth and to fully realize the vision of the Ohio *Third Frontier* program which states: 'Ohio's Third Frontier is committed to transforming the state's economy through the accelerated growth of diverse startup and early stage technology

companies,' it will be necessary for businesses and entrepreneurs in Appalachia and other rural Ohio communities to have full access to a statewide network of broadband resources.

We thank Rep. Ryan Smith (D-93) and Rep. Jack Cera (D-96) for their sponsorship of HB378 and for their continued advocacy for the residents in our region without access or with limited access to critical broadband services. It is my sincere hope that the broadband conversation in Ohio has moved past the 'if' question, and moved on to the 'when' and 'how.'

We support passage of HB378 to ensure that Ohio residents and businesses cannot only survive but prosper in the digital economy. Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me, at 740-374-9436 or at [ballphin@buckeyehills.org](mailto:ballphin@buckeyehills.org), with any questions.

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- <sup>i</sup> *Connecting the Dots of Ohio's Broadband Policy*. OSU's S. William Swank Program in Rural-Urban Policy – April 2017
- <sup>ii</sup> *Ohio's Appalachian Children at a Crossroads*: pg. 13 Children's Defense Fund – 2016
- <sup>iii</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation & Ohio JFS
- <sup>iv</sup> Appalachian Regional Commission Analysis of Census Bureau and American Community Survey Data – [www.arc.gov/data](http://www.arc.gov/data)