

Hon. Ryan Smith

I am writing today in support of House Bill 378 to create the Ohio Broadband Development Grant Program. This legislation would provide last dollar support to encourage vital broadband investment and infrastructure expansion in the vast areas of Ohio that remain unserved.

My name is Matt Morris and I am a senior studying Journalism at Ohio University. I live in Morgan County, Ohio, less than one mile from the village of McConnellsville, which serves as the county seat.

As a Journalism student, I have attempted streaming video projects, uploading audio and video files, and several gigabytes worth of still photos at a time. What takes me 12-15 hours to upload at home, I can travel to Zanesville or Athens and upload the same files in a fraction of the time. I have recently taken interest in broadband connectivity because of the embarrassingly slow internet speeds I have at home.

I attended the July 18, FCC, Town Hall meeting in Marietta and learned I wasn't the only Morgan County citizen concerned with the broadband service provided within the county. Many residents were worse off than I, due simply to where they live.

We hear advice, such as, "Move somewhere else," but really? Where to? Scandinavia, where they understand basic internet to be a fundamental right. This is America, the greatest nation on earth. And that's the best advice you can give? Is this the best service that can be provided?

I think it's sad when a kid enlists in the service, goes overseas, and experiences better technology and connectivity than his or her parents have here at home. Southeast Ohio is full of brilliant and talented kids from low income families, who are being held back by attitudes shaped by cultural ideas and apathetic adults. Broadband offers these kids a vision of life beyond their hills and hollows that can lead to a better life and ultimately a better society.

I have talked with Morgan County School District faculty members about their home internet connection availability and speeds. The advertised speeds given to Connect Ohio are exaggerated. The cable

television internet service providers are delivering approximately 25 Mbps download and 6 Mbps up. The telephone company DSL's are averaging 6 Mbps download and approximately 300 Kbps up.

Verizon Wireless is approximately 6 Mbps down and up, but you have a fixed amount of data you can use. Satellite internet providers have a fixed data limit and are even slower. Wireless seems to be a nice alternative, but rugged terrain and inclement weather disrupts service.

During the last century, Morgan County has lost its coal industry, its electrical manufacturing, and much of its commerce. It has lost its river transportation, its rail transportation and has never had a four-lane highway. There are homes that have more square footage than our grocery stores. And businesses avoid Morgan County because of the way the Post Office dissects the population numbers. Malta and McConnelsville are basically one community, that share many utilities. But to a numbers cruncher, they are two separate entities with nothing in common when they are scrutinized on a spread sheet.

Broadband Connectivity is a complicated subject: socially, technologically, and economically. Morgan County lacks a 20th century, automotive, four-lane highway, but we have an opportunity to make-up for that by providing a 21st century information, super highway. A highway that will encourage entrepreneurial enterprises to pop-up and flourish. Perhaps bring new tax revenues for an area that has lost so many traditional tax revenues. Or at least provide some sort of dignity for people who may not have anything else.

I enthusiastically support HB378 to ensure Ohio residents and businesses can not only survive but prosper in an emerging 21st century digital economy.