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Chairman Smith, Vice-Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and distinguished members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Kathryn Whittington and I presently serve as President of the Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners. I am currently serving in my first term on the board and prior to being elected I served 15 years at Ashtabula County Children Services as the Community Service Coordinator. My husband and I are also small business owners and operate the business out of our home in Richmond Twp.

I am here today on behalf of the Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners, which include my colleagues Commissioner JP Ducro, and Commissioner Casey Kozlowski. As you know, as county commissioners we play a role in fostering development and supporting the overall economic growth in our county. I take this job very seriously and that is what brings me here today, to speak in support of HB 378 which will help fill a void that exists in our community. It is one that I feel hinders economic growth in our county, and that is access to affordable and reliable high speed internet.

I believe HB 378 will be a huge step forward in improving this situation for our county and many others like us. Grant funding from this program would assist us in leveraging local, private and public dollars to have a far greater impact than any other entity could accomplish alone. We want to be partners in this connectivity improvement process. The example of the Northeast Ohio Regional Airport that has secured extensive FAA and ODOT grants with matching funds from private charitable donations to achieve tremendous improvements and allow them meet both FAA and ODOT standards. They now are partnering with Kent State University to apply for an ARC POWER grant to bring broadband to the airport and surrounding area to facilitate an airframe maintenance school on the airport property in conjunction with Kent State University. These opportunities will not continue to present themselves without state support for broadband expansion.

Although our county has four hospitals, seven school districts, a college, two major interstates (one east/west and one north/south), two deep-water ports on Lake Erie, a fully conforming Commercial Operating airport and access to two major rail lines. We still have large tracts of our county that cannot access the internet or if they can, the service is painfully slow or unreliable at best. In fact, I personally do not have access to the internet from home. The location where we built our home does not have adequate infrastructure for internet access. I must travel to our local library to access the internet to complete the administration and bookkeeping of our small business and my son, who is a sophomore at Pymatuning Valley High School, either stays after school or walks to the library in order to complete his school assignments.

Geographically our county is the largest in the state. This can prove to be beneficial but also comes with many challenges, specifically access to adequate infrastructure. With relatively low cost of living and affordable land, expansion and relocation of small businesses in our area or of citizens choosing

to work partially from home while commuting into these other urban communities on occasion will not be possible unless we can provide them with the infrastructure to do so.

Please stand with me in support of HB 378 to bring Ashtabula County into the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it relates to improved technology, enhanced job growth, allowing others to further their education and to help small businesses evolve and grow.

Thank Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony that concludes my comments for today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Ashtabula County Commissioner

Kathryn Whittington, President