

**CONNECTED
NATIONSM**



Testimony of

**Eric Frederick
Vice President of Community Affairs
Connected Nation**

Before the

**Ohio Legislature
House Finance Committee
HB378 – Ohio Broadband Development Grant Program
Proponent Testimony**

***Prioritizing State Investment in
Broadband Deployment***

February 20, 2018

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share Connected Nation's insights on federal and state broadband expansion opportunities and our support for House Bill 378 – The Ohio Broadband Expansion Grant Program. My name is Eric Frederick, and I am Vice President of Community Affairs for Connected Nation, a national non-profit organization with a 16-year history of improving lives and strengthening communities through increased access to, and adoption of, broadband and related technologies.

Headquartered in Bowling Green, Kentucky, Connected Nation's work has impacted more than 30 states, including Ohio, and we served as the nation's single largest grantee under the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) State Broadband Initiative (SBI) grant program. Under SBI, we managed broadband mapping and planning projects across 12 states and 1 territory, representing 42% of the U.S. landmass, and our mapping and data validation techniques have been widely recognized as "best practices" by NTIA, the FCC, and others. CN also has a long history working at the grassroots level in more than 600 communities through initiatives like our Connected Community Engagement Program (ConnectedSM), in which we help local leaders build comprehensive technology action plans for their communities.¹

Our work on the ground in these communities has helped us develop an intimate understanding of the impact that broadband has on rural and urban areas alike, and there can be no doubt that improved funding mechanisms for broadband buildout is one of the most critical tools in closing the Digital Divide nationally.

Last week, the Trump administration released its much-anticipated \$1.5 trillion Infrastructure Plan² which includes \$200 billion in federal funding over 10 years. The Plan outlined a "roadmap for the Congress to draft and pass the most comprehensive infrastructure

¹ <http://www.connectednation.org/get-connected>

² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/INFRASTRUCTURE-211.pdf>

bill in our nation's history" and includes a series of grants and loans to states to improve America's aging infrastructure. The important takeaway for broadband at this juncture, however, is that while the Plan lists broadband as a qualifying project for some of these grants, no *dedicated* carve-out for broadband funding exists. Additionally, the Plan indicates that states will be asked to partner with local and private investments for completion and operation of the projects. This plan is certainly subject to change as it makes its way through Congress, but what is clear is that states *must* take their own actions to make dedicated funding available for broadband buildout and to prioritize quality broadband data.

Other states across the country have realized the need for state-level action on these important issues, and from our research, at least 29 states have enacted legislation, introduced bills, or started to discuss and research potential policy opportunities in the areas of broadband and/or mapping. As broadband funding mechanisms such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Appalachian Regional Commission, Delta Regional Authority, and others require state matching funds and resources to produce competitive applications, Ohio could significantly elevate its future opportunities by establishing a broadband grant program.

For example, my home state of Michigan (or, "that state up north" as it is commonly referred to here), has prioritized state broadband policy. In March 2016, Governor Snyder created the 21st Century Infrastructure Commission to recommend goals and strategies for improving broadband in our state. The goals are aggressive and require bold action, but the state is working in a concerted effort to achieve benchmarks laid out by the Commission, such as a move to connect all residents and businesses to fixed broadband with a minimum speed of 25/3 Mbps, to ensure all areas of the state have access to a *mobile* broadband connection with a download speed of at least 10 Mbps, and to ensure 95% of businesses have a web presence, all by the year 2020. As a result of the 21st Century Infrastructure work, on January 29 of this year, Governor Snyder created the Michigan Consortium of Advanced Networks (MCAN)

responsible for creating a state broadband roadmap by August 1, 2018, and on February 7, he called for \$20M for broadband infrastructure in his proposed budget.

House Bill 378 will allow Ohio to join other states on the path to ubiquitous broadband by not only providing grants for broadband expansion, but by also funding efforts to understand where the unserved areas truly are and are not. Reliable broadband data and mapping is crucial to residents, businesses, and community anchor institutions in areas where robust broadband is lacking and gives voice to those who find themselves on the other side of the Digital Divide. This legislation is smart, good government—by including granular, validated broadband mapping, the broadband grant dollars indicated in this legislation will be meaningfully and purposefully spent in order to deploy access to the thousands of Ohioans who truly need it.

Connected Nation encourages the Ohio Legislature to pass House Bill 378—to set the stage for successful broadband deployment through grants and to provide policymakers like you, the Governor's Office, and others with accurate broadband data needed to ensure ubiquitous coverage in Ohio. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have at this time. Thank you.