



Representative Kent Smith

Ohio House District 8

Public Utilities Committee
May 28, 2020
HCR 26 Sponsor Testimony

Chairman Callender, Vice Chairman Wilken, and fellow members of the Public Utilities Committee: I greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony in support of HCR 26, which would ask the federal government to keep America connected during the Coronavirus outbreak.

As the summer season begins, we are still amid a global pandemic - the scope of which we cannot fully grasp. In this time of a national crisis, now more than ever, we need a steady hand and compassion. Ohioans need leaders who will listen to the science, tell the truth, and accept responsibility. The sad truth is the number of Ohioans tested is too low and our death count is too high, which together suggest that our COVID-19 fight is far from over. Let's briefly explore both of those points.

First, the testing totals. As of yesterday, May 27th, there had been approximately 340,000 COVID-19 tests administered across Ohio. The most COVID tests we have ever done in one day, up to this point, has been 10,000. We were averaging about 9,000 tests a day. But Ohio has 11.7 million residents. Using the high-water mark of 10,000 tests in one day, it will take over 3 years to test the rest of the Ohio population ONE TIME. We need more tests.

On March 17th, we lost the first Ohioan to COVID-19. Since that date, more than 1,657 fellow Ohioans have also died. On May 13, 2020, the Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO) released a data brief that examined the number of COVID-19 related deaths in Ohio and compared it to 2018 data. According to the HPIO report, Coronavirus is now the third leading cause of death in Ohio behind heart disease and cancer. This virus is deadly and due to the lack of tests, it is difficult to know exactly where it lurks. We are all paying a terrible toll; so many people are impacted. We are not at a loss of things that demand our attention. But those challenges do not mean that we should sacrifice our shared values or each other. We remain, stronger together.

What we are all in need of is inspiration and innovation. The good news for us is all 11.7 million Ohioans can provide both. If – we keep their internet access on.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the challenges that many Americans have faced, on March 13th, the FCC Chairman announced the Keep Americans Connected Initiative. In order to ensure that Americans do not lose their broadband or telephone connectivity as a result of these exceptional circumstances, he specifically asked broadband and telephone service providers, and trade associations, to take the Keep Americans Connected Pledge. So far, more than 750 companies and associations have signed the pledge to Keep Americans Connected and have extended that commitment through June 30.

The Keep Americans Connected Pledge is three items:

Given the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on American society, companies have pledged to do the following three things:

1. Not terminate service to any residential or small business customers because of their inability to pay their bills due to the disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic.
2. Waive any late fees that any residential or small business customers incur because of their economic circumstances related to the coronavirus pandemic; and
3. Open its Wi-Fi hotspots to any American who needs them.

You can read more about the Keep American Connected pledge here: => <https://www.fcc.gov/keep-americans-connected>

HCR 26 would ask Congress & the President to work together to make this happen by extending the Keep Americans Connected pledge from its current June 30th conclusion to the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would politely request your support of HCR 26 and I would be happy to answer any questions about it at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.