

**Testimony Before
The Ohio Senate
Finance Subcommittee on Workforce
In Support of H. B. 64
May 19, 2015
Presented by Vince Watts, President of the Greater Stark County Urban League**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am Vince Watts, President of the Greater Stark County Urban League. I am here today to speak in support of the telecom regulatory reform provisions in House Bill 64.

Let me take a moment to tell you a little bit about our history. The Canton Urban League was established in 1921, and the Massillon Urban League in 1936, as affiliates of the National Urban League. As individual entities they successfully served the community with economic, educational, health and wellness, and civic engagement to empower communities and improve the lives of families and individuals. In January of 2006 the Massillon and Canton Urban League Chapters merged to form The Greater Stark County Urban League serving Alliance, Canton, Massillon and surrounding areas within the county. Our mission is to enable African Americans and other minorities to reach full economic, social and health parity to enrich their lives and the lives of their families.

I made the trip to Columbus today to take a few minutes to describe why we support these important telecom provisions in House Bill 64. I know the Legislature has heard a lot the last few years about the technology transition regarding phone service. Consumers and businesses are making the switch to a wireless and wireline network with an Internet Protocol, or IP connection. I was fortunate enough to have worked in the telephone industry for over 20 yrs. prior to joining the Urban League and saw many of these transitions first hand.

The Greater Stark County Urban League is focused on the following areas: Education, Employment, Financial Literacy, Health, and Ex-Offender Services. Through our work in the community we have found that African Americans are more likely than other segments of the population to use the Internet to seek and apply for employment, and are more likely to consider the Internet very important to the success of their job search.

The main focus of the Urban League movement nationwide over the past 100 years is to help individual secure employment. Our recent recession has set the most impoverished communities further behind on the economic index. We continue to struggle with the challenge of matching jobs and opportunities to the low-income communities that need them the most.

Modern technologies and Broadband are an essential part of the work we do at the Greater Stark County Urban League. In a recent study, 50 percent of African Americans said the Internet was important to them in finding a successful job and 36 percent said they applied for jobs online the last time they were in the job market. In order for our community members and businesses to continue to be successful, we must have access to the latest and most advanced technologies and products available.

Nearly every company we work with points clients to their online applications as the first step in getting a job. These opportunities make it easier for clients to connect with businesses across our county and make job searches in small companies easier.

The disparity in access is seen most in the education of low-income and minority students. School access to computers is critical since many students lack such equipment and broadband connections at home. Overall in this country a full 70 – 75 percent of parents with a minor child in the home had broadband access in 2009. While only 56 percent of African-Americans and 45 percent of households with incomes under \$30,000 had adopted broadband by early 2010. Children in these households are thus more likely to be without a broadband connection than most other demographic groups. As a result their opportunity to learn and understand and research information is diminished. With these disparities in home connectivity, some students are more dependent upon utilizing the Internet at school and in the library.

Expanded access to broadband has the potential to bring the double digit unemployment rates seen in many inner-city neighborhoods more in-line with the near full employment rates enjoyed by many other parts of the community.

The Greater Stark County Urban League believes the telecom provisions in House bill 64 will benefit minorities as they continue to embrace the transition to IP networks. Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today about this issue.