House Finance Committee
House Bill 378 Testimony
March 20, 2018

Good morning, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill (HB) 378 – a bill that would create the Ohio Broadband Development Grant Program.

My name is Michelle Francis and I am the Director of Government and Legal Services for the Ohio Library Council. As the statewide organization representing Ohio's 251 public libraries (rural, urban and suburban) and the 8.7 million library cardholders they serve – our members fully understand the need for broadband access in the state of Ohio – they witness it every day.

Access to the internet in today's society is critical and unfortunately, there are still individuals and parts of the state without it. The internet has become a necessity for job seekers, families needing assistance and education. In most cases, individuals without access to the internet visit their local public library to utilize the computers, tablets and Wi-Fi.

In 2016, our public library computers were utilized 16.8 million times, library customers downloaded more than 18.4 million digital materials and more than 18.6 million Wi-Fi sessions were logged. Previous witnesses have indicated that there are 300,000 Ohioans currently without access to the internet. We believe that figure may be higher based on the use we see in our libraries. In fact, many of our members do not turn off the Wi-Fi signals at night after the library has closed because they know there is a need. We have examples where families will sit in their cars in the parking lot of the library after hours so that the kids can complete their school work and book reports.

We appreciate Rep. Smith and Rep. Cera introducing this legislation and we strongly support its passage. Thank you for your time and we look forward to working with you as this bill moves forward in the legislative process. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.