

**CONNECTED
NATIONSM**



Testimony of

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Submitted to the

**Ohio Legislature
Senate Finance Committee
SB225 – Ohio Broadband Development Grant Program
Proponent Testimony**

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

April 9, 2018

Chairman Oelslager and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share Connected Nation's insights on federal and state broadband expansion opportunities and our support for Senate Bill 225 – The Ohio Broadband Development 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 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 in Ohio and across the country.

Other states have realized the need for state-level action on these important issues, and from our research, over 30 states have enacted legislation, introduced bills, or started to discuss and research potential policy opportunities in the areas of broadband and/or mapping. As

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

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.

Senate Bill 225 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 or underserved areas truly are and are not. Federally, this type of accurate data on broadband availability is quite simply deficient. The FCC currently collects data from broadband service providers via what is known as the “Form 477” reporting process, wherein the providers report which Census blocks they are providing service. However, Census blocks can be very large in rural areas, and if even one household in a given block is reported as being served, the entire block is considered as having service and is therefore ineligible for most federal programs that support broadband buildout. These rural areas are where broadband availability is most lacking and needs to be more accurately defined, yet these are the areas

where federal data on broadband availability is the least specific. This is why reliable broadband data and mapping is crucial.

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 Senate Bill 225 — 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. Thank you.