

Senate Finance Committee

Senator Oelslager

Chair

Proponent SB225 Testimony

Ronald J. Rees, Executive Director

Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development

Senate Bill 225: Ohio Broadband Development Grant Program

On behalf of the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development (COAD) I urge the passage of SB225 and companion HB378 in creating the Ohio Broadband Expansion Grant Program. COAD is a coalition of 17 Community Action agencies serving 30 counties in primarily the Appalachian region of Ohio. Viewing a map of broadband availability in Ohio makes it clear that access to this vital service is particularly lacking in the Appalachian region of Ohio. Statewide, 98.99% of households have access to broadband with at least 3 Mbps download and 768 Kbps upload speeds. However, access to broadband is less than that in 27 of the 30 counties served by COAD with as little as 63.83% of households having access in at least one county. Availability of broadband services is an increasingly important part of community development and the lack of availability in Appalachian Ohio severely limits the ability of the region to improve community conditions.

Availability of broadband service is critical to workforce development. Digital skills and access to broadband are required for accessing jobs and training. 70 percent of jobs are posted online and job training programs are increasingly offered online. 8 in 10 middle-skills jobs require digital skills and digitally intensive middle-skills jobs have grown twice as fast as other middle-skills jobs in the past decade.

Availability of broadband service is critical to education. Beginning in elementary school, adequate access to the internet is necessary to fully participate in learning. Many children in Appalachia are unable to access the internet from their homes and need to travel to a public location to complete their assignments. Students in community colleges are even more challenged. Distance learning becomes almost impossible.

Availability of broadband service is critical to business. Customers and suppliers rely on the internet and businesses without access are left out in the cold. Although we desperately need to attract more businesses to Appalachia, none will move here without access to what they consider basic infrastructure.

Availability of broadband service is critical to healthcare. Telemedicine/telehealth for treating patients at rural clinics requires availability as well as accessing health records.

COAD, through its member agencies, has been addressing the root causes of poverty in Appalachian Ohio for nearly 50 years. We are convinced that the availability of broadband service is vital to the community development that is needed to address those root causes. The gaps our communities face in education, workforce development, healthcare and employment all depend on catching up with the rest of the state in broadband access. Thank you for your consideration.