



**Stu Johnson, Executive Director**  
Proponent Testimony for Senate Bill 225  
June 5, 2018

Chairman Oelslager, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Stu Johnson and I serve as the Executive Director for Connect Ohio, a subsidiary of national nonprofit Connected Nation. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 225 – the Ohio Broadband Development Grant Program – and to share why broadband and this bill are so important to Ohio’s future.

Since 2008, Connect Ohio has worked extensively in both urban and rural communities throughout Ohio to bring connectivity to our citizens. We have gathered and field validated data from internet service providers, communities, and state and federal agencies to create and maintain publicly available, granular maps of Ohio’s broadband landscape. We have provided technical assistance and resources to publish in-depth broadband assessments and formulate strategic project plans. Connect Ohio’s efforts and data have helped contribute to more than \$200 million in federal grants and subsidies being awarded to Ohio and its broadband provider community as well as helping inform numerous investments from the private sector.

Connect Ohio’s core mission is to expand broadband access, adoption, and use throughout our state. In executing this mission, I have the opportunity to interact with individuals and businesses directly impacted by a lack of broadband access every day. They feel disconnected figuratively and literally from a society in which nearly everything is dependent upon a reliable internet connection.

I have talked with businesses, community leaders, farmers, first responders, hospital staff, seniors, schools, teachers, students, parents, and many others about their technology use and needs, and I can tell you that broadband is no longer a luxury: it is a vital lifeline to participate in society and an infrastructure that is as critical as our roads, bridges, water, and electricity.

Yet, 300,000 households in rural Ohio have no broadband access – households where children struggle to complete their homework and where parents can’t even send a simple e-mail due to lack of connectivity. An additional 2.1 million households are

served only by a single broadband provider, meaning that more than half of all Ohio households either have no provider choice or no access at all. In Appalachia, this divide is even more pronounced where one in four households have no access to broadband. I'm sure that many of you on this Committee can also share stories about constituents who lack and need broadband access – whether it is to complete homework, search for a job, access healthcare providers, increase agricultural production, run a business, or seek government services.

Senate Bill 225 will significantly aid in bridging Ohio's Digital Divide. Similar in scope to Minnesota's highly successful "Border to Border" Broadband Grant Program, this bill will provide \$50 million per year over the biennium to projects that will ensure that middle-mile and last-mile broadband access is available to the tens of thousands of Ohio households that have little hope of otherwise getting connectivity at modern speeds. The bill rewards creative ways to stretch dollars and build out service to as many people as possible, while also prioritizing broadband service to unserved community anchor institutions, such as education, public safety, and healthcare facilities.

Additionally, Senate Bill 225 would create a statewide broadband map so we can effectively and accurately identify which areas are served and unserved in Ohio. Unfortunately, reliable data on where broadband access is currently available is severely lacking at the federal level, and agencies such as USDA and NTIA are urging states to fund their own broadband data collection and mapping efforts – just as Minnesota, Michigan, and others have done. We cannot fix what we cannot measure; therefore, not only will this legislation *directly* impact broadband growth in our state through grants, but it will also allow us to compete for the numerous federal funding sources available for broadband expansion.

The time to act on these issues is now. Since Senate Bill 225's introduction, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Missouri, Washington, and Wyoming have all enacted their own broadband legislation joining a number of other states with existing broadband programs such as Minnesota, New York, and Tennessee. In our neighboring state of Michigan, Governor Snyder's "21<sup>st</sup> Century Infrastructure Commission" is laying the groundwork for ubiquitous service by allowing the state to work in a concerted effort to achieve benchmarks, such as a move to connect all residents and businesses to fixed broadband with a minimum speed of 25/3 Mbps by the year 2020. In January, Governor Snyder created the Michigan Consortium of Advanced Networks (MCAN) responsible for creating a state broadband roadmap and enlisted the support of our partner organization, Connect Michigan, to help develop the roadmap and recommendations.

Given the action by other states around the country, the federal landscape and need for accurate broadband mapping, and the urgency for broadband expansion in rural Ohio communities, I ask for your support of Senate Bill 225. We must prioritize the path to ubiquitous broadband and give voice to those who find themselves on the wrong side of the Digital Divide. Thank you, Chairman Oelslager and members of the Finance Committee for the opportunity to submit proponent testimony on this important legislation. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.