



May 27, 2020
Before the House Finance Committee
Interested Party Testimony on HB 13

Co-Chair Oleslager, Co-Chair Callender, Ranking Member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am Raja Sundararajan, President and Chief Operating Officer for AEP Ohio. I am here to provide interested party testimony on House Bil 13 (HB 13). Better access to broadband throughout Ohio is not only critical to families and businesses but to electric utilities. To achieve this, AEP Ohio is seeking adoption of an amendment to HB 13 that would authorize electric utilities to deploy middle mile broadband infrastructure. This infrastructure would bring the state much closer to finally addressing Ohio's broadband gap.

Rural Ohio, including much of our service territory, is suffering economically due, at least in part, to a lack of adequate internet access. A decade has already passed since the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) stated that high speed internet, "like electricity a century ago, is a foundation for economic growth, job creation, global competitiveness, and a better way of life. It is enabling entire new industries and unlocking vast new possibilities for existing ones. It is changing how we educate children, deliver health care, manage energy, ensure public safety, engage government, and access, organize, and disseminate knowledge."

To help meet the need for broadband, electric utilities are willing and able to deploy fiber infrastructure to support broadband expansion. Electric utilities are already modernizing the grid by adding fiber to existing utility assets. This fiber can serve as middle mile broadband infrastructure to facilitate cost-effective broadband expansion to underserved and unserved communities. States around and near Ohio continue to adopt this middle mile broadband concept. West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky and Indiana have all authorized middle mile broadband utility infrastructure in some form.

The company's proposal contains a number of provisions that would ensure that the grant dollars contemplated in HB 13 do not overlap with infrastructure deployed by utility broadband facilitators. Applications brought to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio by electric utilities for approval of infrastructure would be required to include an internet service provider's (ISP) written plan to utilize the middle mile infrastructure to bring service to customers. Finally, AEP Ohio could not serve as an ISP.

In conclusion, AEP Ohio respectfully asks this committee to adopt our proposed amendment to HB 13 that would authorize electric utilities to deploy the middle mile broadband infrastructure that is critical to finally closing Ohio's broadband gap.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions.