



November 17, 2020
Before the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee
Proponent Testimony on HB 13

Chairman Wilson, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities 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 proponent testimony on House Bill 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 strongly urges this committee to pass HB 13 with language authorizing electric utilities to deploy middle mile broadband infrastructure.

To help meet the need for broadband, electric utilities are willing and able to deploy fiber infrastructure to support broadband expansion. Electric utilities are modernizing the grid by deploying fiber designed for utility use to our existing assets. HB 13 allows utilities to add middle mile fiber that serves the dual purposes of modernizing the grid along with facilitating cost-effective broadband expansion to underserved and unserved communities as a pilot program. States around Ohio continue to pass legislation similar to this and utilities are currently building middle mile fiber to enable rural broadband. AEP Ohio has been working with legislators and community groups for several years to refine our proposal and build support as evidenced by the letters the committee has received in support of this bill.

HB 13's middle mile provisions ensure that HB 13's grant dollars do not overlap with infrastructure deployed by utilities and limits middle mile broadband infrastructure to areas most in need of broadband investment. Electric utilities would be required to formulate and publish procedures for evaluating proposals from ISPs that seek to utilize utility fiber. Any application brought to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio by electric utilities for approval of middle infrastructure would be required to include an internet service provider's (ISP) documented plan to utilize the middle mile infrastructure to bring service to customers. Finally, AEP Ohio could not serve as an ISP and there are several cost caps in place to protect customers.

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 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." The current pandemic conditions further demonstrate the increasingly crucial need for broadband in unserved areas of Ohio.

In conclusion, AEP Ohio respectfully asks this committee to adopt the version of HB 13 before you that would authorize electric utilities to deploy the middle mile broadband infrastructure that is critical to finally closing Ohio's broadband gap. I would finally like to draw your attention to the list of our community partners who support AEP Ohio's middle mile proposal. Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions.

Community Supporters of HB 13

Lawrence Co Economic Development Corp
Pickaway Progress Partnership
Federal Hocking Local Schools
Alexander Local Schools
City of Portsmouth
Village of East Canton
Tuscarawas Chamber of Commerce
Village of Middleport
Village of Syracuse
Athens City School District
Paulding County Economic Development Inc.
ONDA USA LLC
Keihin Thermal Technology of America, Inc
Babcock & Wilcox (Diamond Power)
Ohio Wesleyan
City of Ironton
Mid Ohio Regional Planning Commission
Village of Salineville
TS Tech USA Corporation
City of Coshocton
Village of Millersburg
Eastern Local School District
Village of Newcomerstown
Liberty Casting Company
City of New Philadelphia
Axium Plastics
Carroll County Commissioners
Coshocton County
City of Belpre
Meigs Local
City of Canton
Hardin County Chamber/Alliance
Carroll County EMA
Twin City Chamber of Commerce
Foundation for Appalachian Ohio
Replex Plastics
City of Toronto
Vinton County Commissioners
Tuscarawas County Commissioners

Ohio Small Business Development/Kent State Tusc
Belpre Mayor
UW of Tuscarawas County
City of Steubenville
Village of Pomeroy
Village of Wellsville
Big Brothers Big Sisters of East Central Ohio
Village of New Boston
Akron Canton Foodbank
Noble County Commissioners
Carrollton Exempted Village School District
Tusky Valley Schools