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Before the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee
Testimony on House Bill 13
November 17, 2020

Chairman Wilson, Vice Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak to you today.

My name is Larry Kidd, Founder, President and CEO :hire. I own and operate :hire (formerly Reliable Staffing Services) in Jackson, Ohio. My company is an employment staffing firm. We have offices throughout Central and Southeastern Ohio and serve both rural and urban clients.

I am here today to discuss our Internet challenges in rural Ohio and specifically House Bill 13.

I live six miles from downtown Jackson, Ohio in beautiful Appalachia. For years, I have struggled to get Internet that can work reasonably enough to perform basic functions, such as downloading a picture or document. My family and I had satellite Internet for several years, but it was only marginal better than dial up service. Currently, we have an ATT hotspot but it is very expensive and unreliable.

This issue is not just about me or my family. My neighbors on my rural street and my other neighbors in parts of rural Ohio suffer the same issues and challenges. This has never been more evident when the pandemic required much of our State to operate from our homes. I was unable to work from home due to poor connectivity. This was also true for several of my employees. Our company, :hire is an essential business, so during the business shutdown a few of my team

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members had to continue to come to the offices. For those employees with poor home connectivity and childcare issues or health concerns, I had no choice but to furlough them.

I am fortunate to serve on the Boards of Ohio Chamber of Commerce and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. During the pandemic both Chambers offered webinars, roundtables, and other informative platforms to assist employers help their employees. Many discussions centered around importance of remote work. This common theme was a direct result of mandated stay at home orders, lack of childcare and concern for personal health and safety. Polls have shown that both employers and employees have found incredible value and productivity in remote work. Several companies have stated that they will continue to embrace a remote work policy. Some companies have stated that their entire staff will be remote. Those employees with poor connectivity are eliminated for these type positions in this “new normal”.

My wife and I are empty nesters. With the stay at home order, our kids would have been severely handicapped with their schooling. Their assignments, homework and communication would have to have been done at my or my wife’s office. This would have been difficult, inefficient and perhaps dangerous for our kids given the pandemic.

The lack of Internet has put an already at-risk group of people at an incredible disadvantage. According to a 2018 U.S. Census survey, the per capita income in Ohio is a little over \$30,000 per year. In Jackson, Ohio, according to the same survey, the per capita income is slightly more than \$22,000 per year. Jackson County citizens earn a

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third less than their counterparts in Ohio. When you have poor access to Internet, the competitive disadvantage increases.

Reliable and consistent Internet has become an essential utility. Just like water, sewage and electric, families need Internet to sustain and grow.

It is unfair for those living in a rural community to be plagued by unreliable or nonexistent Internet. Access to information is vital as we have recently seen during the pandemic, economic downturn, public demonstrations and riots. Please level the playing field so the rural dwellers can enjoy the same access to the basic life utilities such as quality and reliable Internet.

Again, thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. I am available for any questions you may have for me.

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