

**ASHTABULA COUNTY
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Chairman Wilson, Vice-Chair McColley, Ranking Member Williams, and distinguished members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee. The Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners is offering written testimony regarding House Bill 13.

We recognize the desperate need that exists for broadband capability throughout our county to create hope of future growth and economic development as well as to preserve the productivity and competitiveness of our existing businesses, particularly our agricultural community which is a significant driver of our county economy.

The Board believes HB 13 will be a huge step forward in improving this situation for our county and many others like us. Grant funding from this program would assist us in leveraging local private and public dollars to have a far greater impact than any entity could accomplish alone. We want to be partners in this connectivity improvement process. We want to follow the example of the Ashtabula County Airport Authority/Northeast Ohio Regional Airport that has secured extensive FAA and ODOT grants with matching funds from private charitable donations to achieve tremendous improvements and allow them meet both FAA and ODOT standards.

Although our county has four hospitals, seven school districts, a college university, two major interstates (one east/west and one north/south), two deep-water ports on Lake Erie, a fully conforming Commercial Operating airport (one of only two recognized by ODOT), and access to two major rail lines, we still have large tracts of our county that cannot access the internet or if they can, the service is painfully slow or unreliable at best. In fact, Commissioner Kathryn Whittington, who testified previously in favor of this bill, does not have adequate infrastructure for internet access and cannot access the internet at all from her home. She must travel 15 minutes to a local library to be assured of reliable service.

Our county is the largest in the state of Ohio with land area of over 700 square miles. We sit strategically located almost equidistant from Cleveland, Erie, and Youngstown. With a relatively low cost of living and abundant and affordable land, expansion and relocation of small businesses in our area or of citizens choosing to work partially from home while commuting into other more urban communities on occasion, will not be possible unless we can provide them with the infrastructure to do so.

Small businesses, whether they are in the field of manufacturing, technology, medical, tourism, or agriculture, are all going to be dependent on the internet for future growth and success and I think we all know they are going to be the true job creators of the future.

There have been discussions with University Hospitals here in Ashtabula County, about the future of telemedicine and how they could serve our county more efficiently and affordably for both the patient and the hospital if more patients could access a medical professional from their computer at home instead of making a trip to the emergency room.

In addition, we want to share our appreciation for the sponsors' approach to prioritize matching dollars which is both creative and helpful in terms of bringing broadband to underserved areas.

As you are aware, it seems local government funding continues to shrink, and that trend will probably not change in the foreseeable future especially during the pandemic. These types of infrastructure projects, although critical, will probably not be affordable for many rural areas such as Ashtabula County, unless we can creatively find

ways to leverage dollars from various sources to achieve the expensive goals of capital infrastructure expansion such as broadband to meet the technology needs of today and the future.

Please stand with us in support of HB 13 to bring broadband, 21st century technology, job growth, and future thinking to Ashtabula County and other rural communities around the state. Thank you for your consideration. We are open to any questions should you have them.

Sincerely,

ASHTABULA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



Casey Kozlowski, President



Kathryn Whittington, Vice-President



J. P. Ducro IV, Commissioner