



MID-OHIO REGIONAL
MORPC
PLANNING COMMISSION

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***House Bill 13
Written Proponent Testimony
November 17, 2020
Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee
William Murdock, MORPC Executive Director***

Chair Wilson, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee; thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Bill 13 (HB13), which creates the Residential Broadband Expansion Program.

My name is William Murdock and I am the Executive Director of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC). MORPC is a voluntary association of over 70 local governments across Central Ohio's rural, suburban, and urban areas. We provide programs, services, and funding related to transportation, land use, data, sustainability, and economic prosperity. On behalf of our diverse local government members in our 15-county region, we urge you to swiftly pass this commonsense bill. This legislation would create the Residential Broadband Expansion Program. This program would disburse \$20 million in grants during state fiscal year 21 and these funds would provide historically underserved homes access to high-speed internet service.

When looking at a map of unserved broadband locations in our region, it is no surprise that lack of access to broadband becomes more pronounced in our rural areas and smaller communities. Recent studies indicate that nearly one million Ohioans lack access to reliable high-speed internet, with approximately 340,000 rural households having no broadband options at all. The COVID-19 pandemic further amplifies the disparity in access and the need for increased broadband as children transitioned to learning at home. In Central Ohio alone, 17% of school kids lack broadband access.

Broadband is an essential utility for 21st century commerce, education and healthcare. Residents and businesses in underserved communities across Ohio deserve the same quality access to innovations that broadband provides in better-served areas of the state. With limited high-speed connectivity options, many communities have tried to fill the gap by installing public access points. However, these access points don't replace the need for reliable, affordable, in-home access, nor do they address the larger economic development opportunities and other benefits of increasing access to broadband throughout Ohio's unserved or underserved areas. Furthermore, allowing electric utilities to construct middle mile broadband infrastructure will drive down the cost of projects and allow internet service providers to focus their investments on providing access to Ohioans currently without high speed internet.

I would like to add that MORPC regularly convenes a group of public-sector data and digital infrastructure experts called the Regional Data Advisory Committee. This group seeks to coordinate

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digital infrastructure and communication among our members, and broadband expansion is one of its top priorities. By giving communities the ability to apply for grant funding that builds-out our broadband infrastructure system, rural communities in Central Ohio and across the state have the opportunity to further promote a robust economy, attract jobs, and improve access to education and workforce training. In fact, it is estimated that connecting every Ohio household to broadband would grow our state's GDP by \$1.4 billion, an increase of about \$4,000 per household.

Thank you again for the opportunity to express MORPC's support of HB 13. Although this bill alone will not solve broadband disparities in the state, it is a necessary first step. We strongly urge you to pass this needed tool to assist households in obtaining broadband service.

Thank you for your leadership and please do not hesitate to contact me, at 614-233-4101 or at wmurdock@morpc.org, with any questions or whenever MORPC can be of service.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William Murdock". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "William" and last name "Murdock" clearly legible.

William Murdock, AICP
MORPC Executive Director