

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY & PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE
PROPONENT TESTIMONY ON H.B. 13

Chairman Wilson, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Energy & Public Utilities Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written remarks in support of H.B. 13, a bill that would expand broadband access to communities across Ohio.

By way of background, the Ohio Business Roundtable (OBRT) was established in 1992 for one sole purpose: to improve Ohio's business climate. Since its inception, the OBRT has worked with Ohio's governors and legislative leaders to make Ohio more business-friendly and more competitive both nationally and internationally. The Roundtable is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization comprised of chief executive officers of many of Ohio's largest, most successful companies. Because of the collective expertise and insights of OBRT members, the Roundtable is uniquely capable of bringing solutions to improve Ohio's economic vitality and ensure that Ohio remains the ideal state in which to live, work and succeed.

Our organization comes before you today to emphasize the need for this body to address the nearly one million Ohioans who lack a reliable internet connection and the nearly 30,000 households that have no broadband options whatsoever. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the necessity of expanding broadband access to those who currently live in underserved or unserved areas, and who cannot currently participate in the modern education system, modern healthcare system, and modern economy.

Specifically, our membership supports the Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program as outlined in HB 13. This program provides grant funds to private internet service providers to expand into areas where they would not otherwise have the business case to deliver service. Instead of covering the full cost of this investment, the state would incentivize businesses by providing grants to offset construction cost hurdles and help facilitate the expansion of high-speed internet and all broadband services to unserved households across Ohio. By allowing companies to challenge an applicant seeking to expand into an area that already has coverage, this program ensures the grant is reserved only for truly unserved and underserved areas, which are the places in Ohio that do not meet the federal definition of high-speed internet service.

A lack of broadband access also has a direct effect on economic development. When business leaders across Ohio seek to recruit new talent, prospective employees who are looking to move into our region expect to have stable access to the Internet and the other services that go along with that. In areas in which Ohio does not have an adequate Internet infrastructure in place, it hampers our economic developers in their ability to recruit new businesses and capital to the

parts of Ohio that need these investments the most – all while holding our fellow Ohioans back from their own goals and full potential.

The Ohio Business Roundtable applauds State Representatives Rick Carfagna and Michael O’Brien for making access to broadband a legislative priority. And we applaud this committee, and you, Mr. Chairman, for your thoughtful deliberation on this issue which effects both urban and rural communities across our state.

Thank you for allowing the Ohio Business Roundtable to provide testimony in support of H.B. 13. We respectfully ask that the Committee approve this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Michael McLean
Director of Policy
Ohio Business Roundtable