



280 North High Street
Suite 1300
Columbus, Ohio 43215
PH: 614-461-4014
www.octa.org

November 17, 2020

Chairman Steve Wilson
Vice Chairman Rob McColley
Ranking Member Sandra Williams
Senate Energy Public Utilities Committee
Ohio General Assembly

Proponent Testimony before the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee

RE: Sub. HB 13- Creating the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program

Dear Chairman Wilson, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Williams and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Ohio Cable Telecommunications Association (OCTA), I strongly urge your support of Substitute House Bill 13. This legislation directly addresses the digital divide in Ohio by creating a competitive, taxpayer-friendly grant program and reducing regulatory barriers, which will help broadband providers construct the expensive and high-risk last-mile infrastructure needed in unserved parts of Ohio.

While Ohio cable companies have invested more than \$2 billion in broadband and communications services across Ohio in the last two years, pockets of Ohio continue to be unserved. If nothing else, 2020 and the challenges posed by the COVID virus have taught us that access to broadband is a critical resource in all aspects of our daily lives. With education, healthcare, entertainment and basic work requirements provided by broadband service, the need for quality service across all of Ohio has become more acute. Sub. HB 13 addresses the economic realities of constructing last-mile broadband infrastructure to those parts of the state who currently lack reliable, high-speed internet access.

For more than a year, the OCTA has worked with Representatives Carfagna and O'Brien, the DeWine-Husted Administration and other stakeholders to develop Sub. HB 13, and we appreciate the continued work of Chairman Wilson and Vice Chairman McColley to hone the bill language in the Senate. After many months of diligent work and compromise, Sub. HB 13 has our full support. In short, the bill provides a strong framework for broadband grants and facilitates broadband expansion. Sub. HB 13:

-Creates a competitive grant program that will ensure precious taxpayer resources- including the \$20 million allocated for the first round of funding- will only be used to build broadband to unserved areas of the state,

-Protects taxpayers and private-sector broadband providers by creating a transparent grant award and challenge process and ensuring grants are awarded on a provider neutral and technology neutral basis,



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-Encourages even greater investment in Ohio by giving more weight in the application scoring process to broadband providers that demonstrate the experience and ability to build, operate and manage a complex broadband network,

-Supports a fair, fast process for accessing utility poles, allowing for increased investments in rural broadband to reach more unserved homes and businesses in Ohio.

This legislation achieves what it intended to do. It creates a broadband grant program and adopts regulatory improvements that together will help expand broadband service into unserved areas in a fair and meaningful way. We stand ready to continue to be part of future discussions about broadband access and adoption, but the time to complete the vital step that Sub. HB 13 represents is now. We urge your prompt action and support of Sub. HB 13.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I would be pleased to take your questions.

Steve Buehrer
Executive Director
Ohio Cable Telecommunications Association