



Written Testimony on House Bill 13
Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee
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Chair Wilson, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, thank you for the opportunity to lend our support for House Bill 13 (HB 13).

The Greater Akron Chamber (GAC) serves over 1,600 small, mid-market and large companies across Northeast Ohio. The mission of the GAC is to drive economic growth and prosperity for Greater Akron by supporting the success of the business community and acting as a convener of stakeholders on key issues. This directive led us to collaborate with local governments and key stakeholders on taking a hard and honest look at our regional economy, to identify our biggest obstacles and understand the best ways to overcome them. As part of this work, we have identified clear gaps in digital access which demand intentional action to alleviate, which is a problem that exists across the state in both rural *and* urban areas. Through HB 13's predominant purpose of incentivizing private investments to expand broadband access, albeit largely in rural areas, we believe this legislation is a step in the right direction.

After talking with industry partners, we are aware of their strong support for the grant program and electric cooperative easement and pole attachment provisions, and, their concerns on the middle-mile provisions and other areas where the language is viewed to be anti-competitive. We understand their perspective on both fronts and because of this, strongly recommend the legislature take the concerns of industry partners into serious consideration and work with them directly on potential solutions.

As a regional economic development organization, we view expanding broadband access as one of the biggest challenges that Ohio faces because we know that broadband is a conduit to job opportunities, remote healthcare, education and other social supports. Unfortunately, many in rural *and* urban communities have physical and/or financial barriers to digital access. HB 13 has our support because we believe that it would drive private sector solutions in ways that create jobs, generate tax revenue and result in Ohio being more competitive. Throughout the committee process, we encourage the legislature to work towards including solutions that address the digital divide in both rural *and* urban communities and that a theme of equity is present within any resulting policies to ensure that broadband access is expanded to *all* Ohioans.

Understanding there is still work left to be done on this bill, we are confident that this legislation is necessary for Ohio at this time and will be a net-positive for our state. Overall, HB 13 will improve internet connectivity in some of the least connected parts of the state and incentivize new investments from the private sector in critical infrastructure. For these reasons, we urge the legislature to support this important legislation.