



**Proponent Testimony on House Bill 2**

**House Finance Committee**

**Feb. 9, 2021**

Chairman Oelslager and esteemed members of the House Finance Committee. I am offering written, proponent testimony for House Bill 2.

For the Mahoning Valley to provide the education, workforce development and infrastructure necessary for a thriving economy in a globally competitive environment, it is necessary to deploy broadband services to all areas. However, 300,000 households in Ohio lack access to high-speed internet services, according to Innovate Ohio, and the City of Youngstown ranks as the 42<sup>nd</sup>-least-connected city in the U.S. according to the National Digital Alliance.

In addition, the lack of internet service in rural parts of Trumbull and Mahoning counties has been exacerbated by the recent COVID pandemic. As schools transitioned to remote learning, for example, restaurant parking lots throughout our two counties filled up on homework nights as parents and students sought access to the world wide web.

In July of 2018, the Regional Chamber worked with the Ohio Chamber of Commerce Research Foundation and many other organizations throughout the state on publishing the study Ohio BOLD: A Blueprint for Accelerating the Innovation Economy. That study recommends four innovation platforms to accelerate future growth in Ohio and to keep Ohio competitive in the global economy. The Mahoning Valley is uniquely positioned to take advantage of two of those platforms – next-generation manufacturing and materials, and smart infrastructure.

Development of these two platforms is partially dependent on reliable high-speed broadband services. Therefore, the Youngstown Warren Regional Chamber, the third-largest metropolitan chamber of commerce in Ohio with nearly 2,500 members that employ approximately 125,000 workers, recommends passage of House Bill 2.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Humphries". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

**TOM HUMPHRIES**, *President & CEO*

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