



February 16, 2021

Rep. Scott Oelslager
Chairman, House Finance Committee
The Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High St., 13th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Oelslager and Members of the Ohio House Finance Committee:

As pastors and ministry leaders in our great state of Ohio, we have seen the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the multifaceted toll it has taken on our families and communities. We believe no corner of society is untouched, whether that means damage to citizens' health from the virus itself, damage to local businesses and the economy due to shutdowns, or damage to our communities' spiritual direction because of reduced connections with others.

We write today in support of one potential remedy that will assist the most vulnerable Ohioans. House Bill 2 provides an avenue for expanding broadband access, which will help our communities recover from the pandemic, and bring our people closer to the exciting educational, spiritual and medical opportunities afforded by it.

Over one million Ohioans lack broadband access, many in rural or Appalachian communities. Additionally, there are impoverished residents of Ohio cities and suburbs for whom broadband could serve as a lifeline.

Increasing broadband access helps bring more learning opportunities to our area for everyone, including children. These opportunities are much needed as we face a major "skills gap." This is the mismatch between the skills that employers need in their employees and the skills that job seekers actually possess.

Why is that important? Studies show that jobs requiring a postsecondary degree, credential or certificate pay more, allowing parents to provide better for their children. Broadband opens up more work from home opportunities, helping parents to be more present in their children's lives while maintaining employment. Also, adults with a degree or credential have a lower unemployment rate than those without, and stable employment helps strengthen families and communities.

Broadband also opens up educational options to children and adults. We have all heard sad anecdotes about children sitting in their parents' cars trying to access library or business WiFi connections after hours to do their homework or a research project. In some parts of Ohio, this quest for a connection often comes with a long drive to and from the hotspot. Such limited access causes children to fall further behind in learning, compared with their more connected peers.

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Shepherding the Next Generation is a membership organization of pastors and ministry leaders
under the umbrella non-profit Council For A Strong America



Broadband makes online streaming of church services and programming accessible to more people. Right now, bandwidth limitations deprive more than one million Ohioans, including many families and children, of this important opportunity. Additionally, broadband makes telemedicine possible, which improves health care access for both young and old Ohioans.

As church leaders, we take Scriptural mandates seriously and are committed to caring for and speaking out on behalf of children in the most vulnerable circumstances. In the 21st century, this includes those lacking a broadband connection. Thank you and may God continue to bless you as you serve Ohioans.

Looking forward and up,

Pastor John Bouquet

Bethel Baptist Church
Savannah, Ohio

Pastor John Genszler

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church
Oregon, Ohio

Pastor Peter Hamilton

First Baptist Church
Marysville, Ohio

Jill Kingston

Executive Director, Brigid's Path
Kettering, Ohio

Nancy Moore

Co-Founder, Africa Fire Mission
Cincinnati, Ohio

Pastor John Cattell

Disciple's House
Defiance, Ohio

Pastor Brandon Hall

Calvary Baptist Church
Wilmington, Ohio

Pastor Kathryn Ketchum

Community of Faith UCC
Elyria, Ohio

Finn Laursen

Christian Educators Association International
Avon, Ohio

Pastor Adam Will

Mount Hermon United Brethren
Pomeroy, Ohio