



June 3, 2021

Dear Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Gavarone and Ranking Member Sykes,

As a pastor and ministry leader in our great state of Ohio, I have seen the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the multifaceted toll it has taken on our families and communities. I am writing today on behalf of Shepherding the Next Generation, a network of more than 150 of my fellow pastors and church leaders, who support bipartisan, faith- and research-based solutions to develop strong, educated, and moral families. We are seeking the full restoration of \$210,000,000 in state funding for broadband expansion.

We believe the pandemic has left no corner of society untouched, whether that means harm to citizens' health from the virus itself, the effects on local businesses and the economy due to shutdowns, or damage to our communities' spiritual direction because of reduced connections with others.

I write today in support of one potential remedy that will assist the most vulnerable Ohioans. Increasing broadband access 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, including my own community, 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.



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, our members 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 for your consideration and may God continue to bless you as you serve Ohioans.

Looking forward and up,

Rev. Adam Will
Pomeroy, Ohio