



Working together for Ohio farmers to advance agriculture and strengthen our communities.

**Senate Financial Institutions and Technology
HB 2 Proponent Testimony
Jenna Reese, Director of State Policy
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Chairman Wilson, Vice Chair Hottinger, Ranking Member Maharath and members of the Senate Financial Institutions and Technology Committee, on behalf of Ohio Farm Bureau, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2.

Development of broadband infrastructure and increased access for high speed internet is a priority issue for Ohio Farm Bureau. Our farmers rely on it for precision agriculture technology and information about their farms. As farmers are constantly being called upon to help solve Ohio's water quality issues, it is imperative for them to have the technology they need to utilize conservation practices. In addition to best management practices, farmers need the internet to comply with many state and federal regulations as most agencies have transitioned to electronic filing.

With reliable broadband access, Farmers can use web based programs that are essential conservation tools. One such program is the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service's web soil survey. This program is an important conservation tool for farmers to understand the soil types and characteristics for their farms. It requires a high speed connection to utilize this program.

For livestock farmers, high speed internet is equally important for other reasons. For instance, some of our members utilize robotic milking systems. This system allows for the dairy farmer to remotely view the milking process, track the cows and be informed when there is a problem. Dairy farming is tough work, but this system allows the farmers to milk while doing other things, like spending some valuable time with family, and increases the lifespan and wellbeing of the herd. This would not be possible without access to broadband.

Broadband is necessary not just for a more efficient farm, but for improving our rural communities and continuing the farm for years in the future. Retiring farmers want to leave their legacy and land to the next generation. For many, it can be difficult to attract the next generation to return to the farm and continue on in the family tradition. A quality school system will be a major determining factor for where the family puts down roots. Children in rural areas that do not have access to high speed internet will face a disadvantage to their contemporaries. The lack of broadband may mean that farm's next generation will decide not to return to the farm but to find a community with more accommodations that will give their children the tools necessary to compete.



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There is a health crisis afflicting Ohio’s farmers and rural communities, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. As rates of depression and suicide rise among this population, rural communities face a shortage of mental health professionals and closing hospitals. Access to healthcare is currently limited, but telehealth services could help connect our members quickly with the medical professionals they need. Again, these services are only possible if you have high speed internet.

It may sound hyperbolic, but our lives are dependent on technology. Whether it be for education, business, healthcare, or entertainment, our need for reliable internet access for all Ohioans is very important. With new broadband access comes increased economic and educational opportunities and development. Without it, Ohioans in these unserved and underserved areas will continue to fall behind. According to a study by The Ohio State University, 1 million Ohioans —11.7% of its residents — are unserved or underserved by reliable, high-speed internet simply because of where they live.

There isn’t a quick and easy solution to expanding access to broadband; funding is certainly the biggest challenge developers face, and it is evident all funding sources need to be considered as part of a comprehensive solution. Whether it be public investment, private-public partnerships, federal grants, or cooperatives, Ohio needs to engage all resources available as it attempts to deploy broadband into the unserved areas of the state. HB 2 is an important beginning step to address the funding needed for additional broadband infrastructure but a much larger funding mechanism is needed to connect households in rural Ohio.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share Farm Bureau’s support for HB 2, and I will do my best to answer any questions you have.