



State Representative Michael J. O'Brien

SPONSOR TESTIMONY ON SUBSTITTUTE HB 13

SENATE ENERGY AND PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE

JULY 21, 2020

Chairman Wilson, Vice-Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Williams and esteemed members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony on Substitute House Bill 13, which creates the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Program.

This legislation stems from Representative Carfagna's and my combined decades of local government experience at the city, township and county levels, dealing firsthand with constituents struggling to access broadband and exploring options to get service extended to their households.

This is not a bill brought to you on behalf of an industry or organization, nor is it something borrowed from other states. What this bill represents is Ohio's first broadband expansion program specifically targeting unserved residential households. Substitute House Bill 13 would effectively combine efforts by government and private enterprise with the goal of expanding broadband connectivity to unserved households across Ohio.

A 2017 study by The Ohio State University found that nearly one million Ohioans still lack access to fixed broadband service because of where they reside. Indeed, broadband infrastructure can be costly to deploy to households. Private providers, whether terrestrial-based through cable or phone companies, or via wireless or satellite carriers, continually balance the costs of construction with rates of return.

Although a cable, telecom, or wireless provider may service a city, village, or township, it does not always result in 100% coverage of homes and businesses within that community. Not only does Ohio still have many rural communities largely without broadband, there is also a significant "marbling" of unserved streets and household clusters throughout many suburban and urban communities otherwise already served. Substitute House Bill 13 would target this problem of last mile connectivity to residences where it remains cost-prohibitive for private providers to extend their plant.

Now, more than ever, life as we know it is dependent upon broadband, and access to it is required. For all those who are still working from home during this pandemic; for those receiving vital medical care thru Telehealth; and for those filing for unemployment benefits, access is required. For K-12 and college students, and for anyone in Ohio who wants to expand their knowledge and discover new worlds, access is required.

Access to the informative and educational tools provided by broadband should be available to ALL regardless of where they live.

I respectfully ask for your support of Substitute House Bill 13, and thank you for your consideration.