



OHIO

February 8, 2021

The Ohio House of Representatives  
77 South High St.  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Members of the Ohio House Finance Committee,

We are members of ReadyNation, a bipartisan national nonprofit organization of more than 2,700 business leaders, with more than 70 members in Ohio. As members of ReadyNation, we support smart policies that put kids on the right track early in life, so that they can reach adulthood with the skills that our economy demands.

Research shows that children who start out behind often stay behind. The educational attainment and employment levels of their parents are often major determining factors of a child's starting point.

One significant barrier to academic and employment success is the lack of a broadband connection. This "digital divide" leaves children behind their more connected peers in school, and it makes distance learning impractical for working adults without access. More than 300,000 households, which is close to one million Ohioans, currently lack reliable broadband access.

Addressing the digital divide has become a more pressing matter during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students have had to rely more on online learning resources, and employers and workers are doing more work remotely now than ever before. Those without broadband access are left behind.

How widespread is the problem? Recent research reveals that Ohio is seventh in the nation in the number of K-12 students who lack adequate internet connection to participate. There are 500,000 children (29 percent) without adequate internet connection and 402,000 children (24 percent) without adequate devices. Twenty-three percent of students who lack adequate internet access in Ohio are Black, Hispanic, or Native American.

Passing House Bill 2 will help bridge this divide. We know that the broadband shortage often stems from a low return on infrastructure investment for broadband providers. This bill will allow the state to work with service providers to defray the costs associated with expansion to areas with lower population density. Studies show that Ohio broadband coverage ranks near the middle of US states, and we lag behind neighboring states of Indiana, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. Better, more affordable broadband coverage in these other states puts Ohio at a competitive disadvantage.

The future workforce and economy of Ohio depend on our state equipping all students with the skills and credentials they need. Approximately 65 percent of Ohio jobs will require a postsecondary degree,

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credential or certificate; yet, fewer than 50 percent of Ohio adults have reached this level of attainment. Broadband access is a key component to delivering educational resources to meet this goal while also opening up communities to greater employment opportunities.

By investing in our students today with House Bill 2, our economy will thrive tomorrow.

Sincerely yours,

**Dan Bates**

*President and CEO*  
Hamilton Area Chamber of  
Commerce

**Maureen Boggs**

*Early Care & Education*  
*Division Director*  
Corporation for Ohio  
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**Christopher Burns**

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