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Good afternoon, Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Schuring and Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee. I'm here today to discuss Senate Bill 8, which creates the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program within the Development Services Agency.

Some of the members of the committee should be familiar with this bill as it was introduced last General Assembly as House Bill 13, sponsored by Representative Carfagna. While House Bill 13 was over in this chamber, I was fortunate enough to work with Rep Carfagna and the interested parties to create a substitute version that accomplished several things. First, it clarified the rate challenge process regarding pole attachments and designated appropriate court proceedings, should a challenge occur. Secondly, it moves the program back under the Development Services Agency, as opposed to an earlier version of the bill that housed it under the Department of Commerce. Finally, this version of the bill removes language regarding Broadband Facilitators. These changes came after numerous Interested Party meetings my office held this past fall with input from the DeWine administration, various cable and broadband companies, and the rural electric cooperatives.

. This legislation is crucial to Ohioans if we want to continue strengthening our economy, education, and resources available to our citizens. This bill aims to increase access to broadband services throughout the state as nearly one million Ohioans lack access to high speed internet, with the majority of those Ohioans living in traditionally underserved areas. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of internet access in our everyday lives as our communities adjusted to the need for virtual interactions. Our need for internet access has always been apparent, but this year in particular has shown how detrimental it can be without it. Between our children's educational requirements, telemedicine needs, remote working or even applying for unemployment, it is crucial now more than ever to finally enact legislation that begins to serve these neglected areas of the state.

I'd like to thank the members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities committee for allowing me to testify today. At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.