



February 2, 2021

Good Morning Chairman Peterson, Vice Chairman Schuring, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 8, legislation that creates the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program. This testimony is on behalf of the Ohio Voter Rights Coalition (OVRC). OVRC is a grassroots advocacy coalition of organizations dedicated to the preservation and expansion of voting rights through legislation, administrative rules, and agency policies. Principal organizations of OVRC are the League of Woman Voters of Ohio, Common Cause Ohio, All Voting is Local, Ohio Voice, and the ACLU of Ohio. We commend the inclusion of broadband expansion in the Senate's top ten priority bills, and appreciate the diligence that went in to crafting this legislation.

It's a simple fact that internet access has become a necessity. Businesses and governments have turned to the internet to offer more convenient and efficient customer services, and as a result, Ohioans without reliable broadband access are being left behind. As Ohio works to modernize its operations, special consideration must be given to Ohioans that do not enjoy the benefits of high-speed, reliable internet. The Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program has the potential to extend access to these emerging markets to Ohioans living in traditionally underserved areas.

OVRC specifically sees the benefits this grant program will give to voters. Ohioans with internet access can register to vote online, use the BMV's online change of address portal, conduct an online polling location search, track their absentee ballot application and ballot, and use the Secretary of State's online "Voter Toolkit." Ohioans without internet access cannot, and the proliferation of internet-based government services will only perpetuate this digital divide further. Future advancements in voting technology will not be fully realized until all voters in Ohio have a reliable internet connection. Once all Ohioans have dependable internet, we will be limited only by our imagination and innovation. Every voter in Ohio deserves the same level of access. Passing Senate Bill 8 and establishing the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program is a critical step to making uniform access a reality.

We would like to thank Senator McColley and Representative Carfagna for their leadership on this issue, and urge favorable passage of Senate Bill 8.