



BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMITTEE
TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 8
February 2, 2021

Good morning Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee. My name is Tony Long, Director of Tax & Economic Policy for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. I am offering proponent testimony for Senate Bill 8.

Ohio is the 7th largest economy in the United States and the 21st largest economy in the world. For Ohio to continue to compete, innovate and meet the technological opportunities of the 21st century it needs to find ways to deploy broadband services to all areas of the state. Currently, according to the Innovate Ohio website, 300,000 households in Ohio lack access to high-speed internet services. SB 8 provides a solid framework to begin to address the gap in access for those 300,000 households. Through two application periods each year private companies can submit proposals to the Ohio Development Services Agency (DSA) to address the broadband needs of a specific location. The applications will be reviewed by a dedicated Broadband Expansion Program Authority inside the DSA. This process encourages leaders at all levels of government to work with private sector providers to identify solutions that address the needs of the community while supporting economic growth.

As this COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, our lives are becoming more dependent on technology. Whether for education, business, healthcare, or shopping for goods and services, our need for reliable high-speed internet access is very important in our daily life. With increases in access to high-speed internet connectivity Ohioans will enjoy new economic and educational opportunities. This in turn will foster the development of a workforce ready to meet the economic challenges of the 21st century and keep Ohio a great place to work and raise a family.

In July 2018, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce Research Foundation published a study: Ohio BOLD: A Blueprint for Accelerating the Innovation Economy. That study recommended four innovation platforms to accelerate future growth in Ohio's economy and to keep Ohio competitive in the global economy: Next-Generation Manufacturing and Materials; Future Health; Smart Infrastructure; and Data Analytics. Development of any of the four recommended platforms is partially dependent on reliable high-speed broadband services to fuel collaboration and delivery of new products and services. As the World Economic Forum in its highly touted Global Competitiveness Report explains: In the long run, standards of living can be expanded only by technological innovation ... This requires an environment that is conducive to innovative activity, supported by both the public and the private sectors.

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce urges passage of SB 8. It will kick-start the process to bring high-speed internet access to the 300,000 households in need of that access. Technology continues to play a significant role in our daily life and access to that technology will create a brighter economic future for all Ohioans.

Thank you for your time, and I will try to answer any questions you may have for me.