

Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee  
Senate Bill 8 – Broadband Expansion Program  
Proponent Written Testimony  
February 9, 2021

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill (SB) 8.

My name is Jay Smith and I am the Director of Government and Legal Services for the Ohio Library Council (OLC). OLC is the statewide organization representing Ohio's 251 public library systems (rural, urban, and suburban) and the 8.4 million library cardholders they serve.

In testimony during the previous General Assembly on House Bill 13, we noted the importance of access to the internet in today's society and its essential function as a basic utility. That became even more evident and profound with the onset of the pandemic in 2020. When Ohio's public libraries temporarily closed their buildings to help stop the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), library staff quickly came up with ways to continue to serve their communities. Ohio's libraries rapidly adapted their services by launching virtual programs, expanding digital collections, and sought out ways to help Ohioans get connected with internet access. In 2020, public libraries saw a 33% increase in digital book circulation (ebooks and audiobooks) over 2019.

While libraries expanded online services like e-books, streaming media, and new virtual programming, many libraries made enhancements to keep their Wi-Fi on. For example, the Bossard Memorial Public Library (Gallia County) extended its Wi-Fi capabilities so that people could access the library's internet from the parking lot. The library also loaned all of its mobile Wi-Fi hotspots, giving some to students who are taking online classes. The Elyria Public Library loaned iPads to their local nursing home so residents could continue to read online and stay connected with their families.

In previous testimony, we had cited the fact that many libraries leave their Wi-Fi signals on at night. A library in southeast Ohio reported that 50% of their Wi-Fi usage takes place after the library's normal business hours. Access to the internet in turn supports distance learning, unemployment assistance and other resources for impacted workers and businesses.

Attached to this testimony are some news articles and links showing how libraries have worked to help offer access to the internet in their communities.

SB 8 will help incentivize the expansion of broadband access into much needed areas of the state. We would like to thank Sen. McColley for introducing this legislation and reinforce our strong support for its passage. If you have any questions about our support for SB 8, please feel free to contact OLC.