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**Written Testimony
Senate Bill 8
Senate Energy & Public Utilities Committee
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PCs for People

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chairman Schuring, Ranking Member Williams, and members of the Senate Energy & Public Utilities Committee, we appreciate the opportunity to express our support for Senate Bill 8.

Through electronic reuse PCs for People provides the opportunity for low-income individuals and nonprofits to benefit from the life changing impact of computers and mobile internet. With locations in Ohio, Minnesota, Colorado, Maryland, Missouri and Illinois, PCs for People provides low-cost computers and wireless hotspots as well as flat-fee tech support and digital literacy training to help residents get—and stay—connected. We have distributed more than 115,000 computers, subscribed 96,000 families to low-cost internet, and recycled 7 million pounds of electronics across the country. PCs for People Ohio began operations in Cleveland in 2018 and has since expanded to serve families in need across the state. In 2020, PCs for People distributed 8,000 computers and 7,000 hotspots throughout Ohio, often in partnership with local schools, libraries, and nonprofit organizations.

The critical and urgent issue of the digital divide remains a very important priority for all in our community, and we provide free pick up and recycling of electronic waste from businesses and refurbished desktop and laptop computers for distribution to residents in need. So far and with the help of the Greater Cleveland Partnership and partners like Eaton Corporation, numerous companies, organizations, and individuals have signed up to donate devices. Thanks to their generosity over 8,000 computers were donated in 2020. With over 1,600 Cuyahoga County residents signed up to receive additional devices (many requesting both a computer and internet hotspot), the need is still great, and we are extremely thankful for the State of Ohio's partnership in this endeavor.

Lt. Governor Jon Husted and many other elected officials have issued a challenge to companies in Ohio to help bridge the digital divide, and these businesses are responding in an effort to help under-privileged citizens of our state get connected to the internet. In mid-December, for example,

the State of Ohio donated a surplus of 148 computers to PCs for People to help more Ohioans afford and obtain an internet-enabled device that is suitable for working and learning. The donation is a key example of a BroadbandOhio project that builds upon efforts to expand and enhance broadband connectivity for businesses and families in Ohio.

Offering low-cost connectivity options through partnerships with national carriers has been a crucial component of our comprehensive approach to digital equity for years. We offer wireless internet hotspots in partnership with the Sprint/T-Mobile network: eligible households can pay \$15/month for unlimited data plans with no contract or hidden fees. Mobile internet hotspots are a key solution for many clients who may not stay at the same address for long periods, and the no-contract service allows clients to turn their subscription on and off as needed. In 2020, as new technologies have become available at the same time that the need for high-speed, reliable yet affordable broadband has become increasingly evident nationwide, we have begun to implement our own small cell neighborhood internet service provider (NISP) platform, using 4G LTE technology. This fixed wireless approach to bridging the “last mile” of the internet divide allows the signal to be beamed using the same technology that large cell phone carriers use, achieving faster speeds than mobile hotspots, capable of up to 120 Mbps. This model allows for a more affordable and high-quality service while also ensuring that we continue to have wireless hotspot subscriptions available for those who need them.

Cuyahoga County is one of the worst connected communities in the U.S. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, 19 percent of households in the County do not have any type of Internet service, including mobile data plans. About 32 percent of households in the County do not have a broadband connection at home, and 63 percent of these households have annual incomes below \$35,000. Additionally, for many County residents with an internet connection, access to reliable broadband is sporadic, and they are forced to settle for inadequate speeds. The COVID-19 crisis has made the dramatic inequality of the digital divide impossible to ignore, as technology access is now necessary for students to continue learning, for parents to work remotely, and for families and communities to stay connected to vital services and networks. The pandemic has shown that internet and home computer access are now necessary for engagement with key aspects of daily life. Moreover, it has exacerbated the socioeconomic, geographic, and racial inequities in digital access, as those without reliable connectivity risk falling behind in work or school, or missing important appointments or applications.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to express our support for SB 8 and we look forward to working with you further in the future.

Sincerely,

Bryan Mauk
Executive Director, PCs for People Ohio