

May 31, 2022

RE: Letter of Support re: HB 430 Amendment – Version C

Dear Members of the Senate Energy & Public Utilities Committee,

On behalf of the CEO members who make up the Ohio Business Roundtable, I am writing to express support for a proposed legislative amendment that will encourage telecommunications investment dollars spent in Ohio to be focused on the products and services today's consumers want and need. While the Ohio General Assembly took action on this topic some seven years ago, implementation of that effort has stalled, and requires the clarification this amendment provides.

The 2015 legislation provided a pathway, with appropriate consumer safeguards, for incumbent local exchange telephone companies to withdraw the offering of legacy landline service that few customers still use. Despite passage by the Ohio General Assembly, the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) has yet to adopt rules to accomplish what the legislature approved. The law gave the PUCO six months to complete that work, yet seven years later the job is not finished.

Not only are customers abandoning outdated landline services in droves, but manufacturers of the equipment needed to maintain and operate the networks that deliver those services have likewise moved on. Seven years ago, it had become increasingly difficult for telecommunications companies to obtain the spare parts to maintain these antiquated systems – forcing providers to turn to eBay to find equipment. Today, it is virtually impossible.

In addition, concerns that this amendment will leave areas of the state without service are unfounded. Under this proposal, if a provider wants to withdraw service from an area, it needs to apply to do so through PUCO and the FCC. Furthermore, the provider interested in withdrawing would need to identify another provider in the area that also is serving the area with a reasonable price. This safeguard would ensure a provider cannot abandon an area without service.

Ohioans and Ohio's employers are best-served if the considerable resources spent on maintaining outdated and unwanted services – like legacy voice services – are instead invested in modern, high-speed networks. The greater flexibility providers have to invest in modern, in-demand services, the more quickly we can close the remaining connectivity gaps in Ohio. We stand behind the help this amendment will provide to allow the Ohio General Assembly's 2015 intentions to be completed, putting greater focus on technologies that will serve us both today and into the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this important issue, and I urge passage of the amended version of HB 430.

Sincerely,

Pat Tiberi
President & CEO
Ohio Business Roundtable