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Cheryl Subler, Executive Director

Senate Financial Institutions and Technology Committee
House Bill 2 – Proponent Written Testimony

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March 9, 2021

Chairman Wilson, Vice Chair Hottinger, Ranking Member Maharath and members of the Senate Financial Institutions and Technology Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written proponent testimony in support of House Bill 2.

CCAO has been a longtime supporter of expanded broadband access. Access to affordable and reliable broadband is becoming the social equalizer of our time. Broadband access is increasingly needed for businesses to access global marketplaces, students to access educational resources, patients to access telehealth options and more. Without widespread broadband access, too many Ohioans are simply being left behind.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened the need for reliable and affordable high-speed internet. Lack of access to broadband has left an estimated 300,000 Ohio households excluded from these benefits, making already challenging circumstances even more difficult. In order for Ohio to recover and prosper, widespread access to broadband is a must.

House Bill 2 establishes a residential broadband expansion program that will make an impactful difference for Ohioans currently lacking broadband access. The bill contains a \$210 million appropriation and establishes a competitive grant program through which broadband providers may apply for these state funds to make residential broadband expansion projects economically feasible in unserved and underserved areas.

Under the bill, counties may request the Ohio Development Services Agency to solicit applications for broadband providers for program grants for eligible projects in the municipal corporations and townships of the county. Local governments also may invest in expansion projects to help turn proposed expansions into reality.

One improvement to the legislation would be to allow all broadband service providers access to the grant program. Broadband providers, whether they be private providers, co-operatives or government-owned/quasi government-owned networks should all have access to apply for these expansion grants. Ensuring broad access to grant funds allows for the maximum number of providers to compete, and ultimately, the greatest number of Ohioans to benefit at the lowest cost.



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CCAO thanks Representatives Carfagna and Stewart for introducing this legislation and highlighting the need for this critical service.

Thank you for your time and consideration of CCAO's testimony. Should you have any questions about our position, please feel free to contact CCAO.