

**ASHTABULA COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS**
Casey R. Kozlowski
Kathryn L. Whittington
J. P. Ducro IV



25 W. Jefferson Street
Jefferson, Ohio 44047-1092
Phone: (440) 576-3750
Fax: (440) 576-2344
commissioners@ashtabulacounty.us

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Chairman Smith, Vice-Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and distinguished members of the House Finance Committee, my name is J.P. Ducro IV. I am currently serving in my first term as Ashtabula County Commissioner having previously served 5 years as Council President for the City of Ashtabula. I am also a fifth generation funeral director in Ashtabula County operating a family business in existence since 1853.

I became involved in government to help make things better for our county and our communities that have been ravished with poverty, drug addiction, and stagnant job and wage growth for many years. I quickly recognized the desperate need we have for broadband capability throughout our county to create hope of future growth and economic development as well as to preserve the productivity and competitiveness of our existing businesses, particularly our agricultural community which is a significant driver of our county economy.

I, along with my colleagues Commissioner Kathryn Whittington and Commissioner Casey Kozlowski, believe HB 378 will be a huge step forward in improving this situation for our county and many others like us. Grant funding from this program would assist us in leveraging local private and public dollars to have a far greater impact than any entity could accomplish alone. We want to be partners in this connectivity improvement process. We want to follow creative examples like the Ashtabula County Airport Authority/Northeast Ohio Regional Airport that has secured extensive FAA and ODOT grants with matching funds from private charitable donations to achieve tremendous improvements and allow them meet both FAA and ODOT standards. They now are partnering with Kent State University to apply for an ARC POWER grant to bring broadband to the airport and surrounding area to facilitate an airframe maintenance school on the airport property in conjunction with Kent. These opportunities will not continue to present themselves without state support for broadband expansion.

Although our county has four hospitals, seven school districts, a college university, two major interstates (one east/west and one north/south), two deep-water ports on Lake Erie, a fully conforming Commercial Operating airport (one of only two recognized by ODOT), and access to two major rail lines, we still have large tracts of our county that cannot access the internet or if they can, the service is painfully slow or unreliable at best. In fact, Commissioner Kathryn Whittington, who testified previously in favor of this bill, cannot access the internet at all from her home and must travel 15 minutes to a local library to be assured of reliable service.



Our county is the largest in the state of Ohio with land area of over 700 square miles. We sit strategically located almost equidistant from Cleveland, Erie, and Youngstown. With a relatively low cost of living and abundant and affordable land, expansion and relocation of small businesses in our area or of citizens choosing to work partially from home while commuting into other more urban communities on occasion will not be possible unless we can provide them with the infrastructure to do so.

Small businesses, whether they are in the field of manufacturing, technology, medical, tourism, or agriculture, are all going to be dependent on the internet for future growth and success and I think we all know they are going to be the true job creators of the future.

Just this weekend, I had a discussion with the Jason Glowczewski, the current COO for University Hospitals here in Ashtabula County, about the future of telemedicine and how they could serve our county more efficiently and affordably for both patient and hospital if more patients could access a medical professional from their computer at home instead of making a trip to the emergency room.

In addition, I want to share my appreciation for the sponsors' approach to prioritize matching dollars which is both creative and helpful in terms of bringing broadband to underserved areas.

As you are aware, it seems local government funding continues to shrink and that trend will probably not change in the foreseeable future. These types of infrastructure projects, although critical, will probably not be affordable for many rural areas such as Ashtabula County unless we can creatively find ways to leverage dollars from various sources to achieve the expensive goals of capital infrastructure expansion such as broadband to meet the technology needs of today and the future.

Please stand with me in support of HB 378 to bring broadband, 21st century technology, job growth, and future thinking to Ashtabula County and other rural communities around the state. Thank you for your consideration. I am open to any questions should you have them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J.P. Ducro IV".

J.P. Ducro IV
Ashtabula County Commissioner
440-969-4914