



Written Testimony on House Bill 2

House Finance Committee

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Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee regarding the Greater Cleveland Partnership's support for House Bill 2 (HB 2). Additionally, we appreciate the leadership of Representative Carfagna, Senator McColley, and others to increase affordable access to broadband internet.

With more than 12,000 members, the GCP is the largest metropolitan Chamber of Commerce in the state. We are focused on driving the economic vitality of our region by building a strong and thriving climate for the broad business community, including small businesses, middle-market companies, and larger corporations. Our work encompasses a commitment to grow and retain a 21st century workforce and engage the region's stakeholders to address systemic inequalities that hinder economic growth. Reliable, affordable access to broadband internet is a part of this important work and swift passage of SB 8 offers a step in the right direction.

The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing economic crisis has further exposed the digital divide throughout Ohio and Cleveland is no exception. Unfortunately, Cleveland remains the most disconnected large city in the nation. According to the National Digital Inclusion Alliance almost a third of Cleveland households have no internet connectivity and nearly half of the city households have no wired connection. For Cleveland, the digital divide goes beyond a lack of infrastructure. Our city's unaffordable and often unreliable internet service options prevent progress and economic recovery – most notably limiting efforts around education, telehealth, and small businesses.

We call for investments in infrastructure that will support digital inclusion and technology-based economic development statewide, including broadband. HB 2 – which allows broadband providers to apply for state grants for service provided to unserved and distressed areas – is a good starting point to achieve this goal.

Beyond GCP's support for this legislation, we understand more must be done in the effort to advance digital inclusion and we will continue to urge for a targeted approach in Cleveland. We stand ready to work with countless partners in our region and across the state, including the legislature, InnovateOhio, and JobsOhio, to help solve our state's digital challenges and prepare Ohioans for the future of work.



We are grateful for the Ohio House's focus on a broadband expansion strategy and believe that bills such as HB 2 are crucial. Thank you for the opportunity to express our support for HB 2 and we look forward to our continued work with you.