



MID-OHIO REGIONAL
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PLANNING COMMISSION

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House Bill 2
Written Proponent Testimony
February 9, 2021
House Finance Committee
William Murdock, Executive Director, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission

Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Crawley, and members of the House Finance Committee: thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Bill 2 (HB 2), which creates the Residential Broadband Expansion Program.

My name is William Murdock, and I am the Executive Director of the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC). MORPC is the regional council for Central Ohio and voluntary association of 75 diverse local governments from urban, rural, and suburban communities. We provide programs, services, and funding related to transportation, land use, data, sustainability, and economic prosperity. On behalf of our local government leaders in our 15-county region, we urge you to swiftly pass this commonsense bill. The Residential Broadband Expansion Program would disburse \$20 million in grants during state fiscal year 22, and these funds would provide historically underserved homes with access to high-speed internet service.

When looking at a map of unserved broadband locations in our region, it is no surprise that lack of access to broadband becomes more pronounced in our rural areas and smaller communities. Recent studies indicate that nearly one in ten Ohioans lacks access to reliable high-speed internet, with approximately 340,000 rural households having no broadband options at all. The COVID-19 pandemic has only amplified the disparities in access and the need for increased broadband as our neighbors use the internet to work remotely, apply for unemployment, and access health care services, and our children continue to learn at home. In Central Ohio alone, 17 percent of schoolchildren lack broadband access.

Broadband is an essential utility for 21st century commerce, education, and healthcare. Residents and businesses across Ohio deserve the same access to innovations that broadband provides in better-served areas of the state. Many communities with limited high-speed connectivity options have tried to address their residents' needs by installing public access points. However, these access points do not replace reliable, affordable, in-home internet access, nor do they address the significant economic development opportunities and other benefits that would result from increasing access to broadband throughout Ohio's unserved and underserved areas.

Access to broadband is a priority in our work as a regional council. MORPC regularly convenes a group of public-sector data and digital infrastructure experts called the Regional Data Advisory Committee. This group seeks to coordinate digital infrastructure and communication among our members, and broadband expansion is one of its top priorities. By giving communities the ability to apply for grant funding to expand our broadband infrastructure system, rural communities in Central Ohio and across the state would have the opportunity to further promote a robust economy, attract

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jobs, and improve access to education and workforce training. In fact, it is estimated that connecting every Ohio household to broadband would grow our state's GDP by \$1.4 billion, an increase of about \$4,000 per household.

Thank you again for the opportunity to express MORPC's support of HB 2. Although this bill alone will not solve broadband disparities in the state, it is a necessary first step. We strongly urge you to pass this much-needed tool to assist Ohio households in obtaining broadband service.

Thank you for your leadership and please do not hesitate to contact me, at 614-233-4101 or at wmurdock@morpc.org, with any questions or whenever MORPC can be of service.

Kind Regards,



William Murdock
Executive Director, Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission