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Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee
Senate Bill 8 – Proponent Written Testimony

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Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill 8.

CCAO has been a longtime supporter of expanded broadband access. The COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened the need for reliable and affordable high-speed internet. The pandemic has forced millions of Ohioans to rely on broadband connectivity for access to education, commerce, telehealth, social connectedness and countless other functions. Unfortunately, lack of access to broadband has left an estimated 300,000 Ohio households excluded from these benefits. In order for Ohio to prosper, widespread access to broadband is a must.

Senate Bill 8 establishes a residential broadband expansion program that will make an impactful difference for Ohioans currently lacking broadband access. The bill contains a \$20 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 encourage buy-in and help turn proposed expansions into reality.

One suggested improvement to the legislation is 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 allows for the maximum number of providers to compete, and ultimately the greatest number of Ohioans to benefit.

CCAO thanks Senator McColley for introducing this legislation and highlighting the need for this critical service in many areas of the state that have not been adequately served.

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.



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