



**Sub. HB 13 (Carfagna, O'Brien) – Broadband Expansion Program
Proponent Testimony (Written Only)
Ohio Municipal League & Ohio Township Association
May 27, 2020**

On behalf of our members, we are writing to offer our support for Substitute House Bill 13, which would establish the Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Grant Program within the Ohio Department of Commerce.

Our associations continue to advocate for reliable and affordable high-speed internet (or broadband access) for all of Ohio. Internet access has swiftly become a necessity for Ohioans' daily lives, offering crucial, life-improving services, such as educational and employment opportunities. However, such access continues to be an issue for local governments and their residents. The OML and OTA appreciate Representatives Carfagna and O'Brien's commitment to this effort.

House Bill 13, as originally drafted, would have established a broadband expansion program within the Development Services Agency and required local governments to be a "project sponsor." While local input is important, management in an unknown field may have proved prohibitive for some jurisdictions. Rather than require local governments to initiate and manage this process, the substitute bill provides for direct application through the Department of Commerce. The bill also provides a path for local jurisdictions to request that the Department publicize broadband need in a certain area, so local governments may still draw attention to the needs of their jurisdiction.

Additionally, the substitute bill alters the funding structure of the program. Rather than requiring the project sponsor to fund two-thirds of the funding gap for a project, the Department would support the entirety of the funding gap, while leaving room for other sources of support, such as private, local government, or federal funds. This model continues to promote local "buy-in," while further reducing cost barriers for local governments.

Although local governments are no longer managing the application process, they are still recipients of the end benefit – getting much needed broadband access to their residents with support from the state. The Ohio Municipal League and the Ohio Township Association continue to support Sub. HB 13 and urge the House Finance Committee to favorably report the bill to the full House for a vote. Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns about our position, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Respectfully,

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