



House Finance Committee
House Bill 13 Testimony
June 19, 2019

Good morning, Chairman Oelslager, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill (HB) 13 – a bill that would create the Residential Broadband Expansion Program.

My name is Michelle Francis and I am currently the Director of Government and Legal Services for the Ohio Library Council. As the statewide organization representing Ohio's 251 public libraries (rural, urban and suburban) and the 8.4 million library cardholders they serve – our members fully understand the need for broadband access in the state of Ohio – they witness it every day.

Access to the internet in today's society is critical and unfortunately, there are still individuals and parts of the state that still lack access to this basic utility. The internet has become a necessity for job seekers, families needing assistance and education. In most cases, individuals without access to the internet visit their local public library to utilize the computers, tablets and Wi-Fi.

In 2018, our public library computers were utilized more than 14 million times for the internet, library customers downloaded more than 42 million digital materials and logged 22.7 million Wi-Fi sessions. Previous testimony has indicated that there are roughly one million Ohioans without access to broadband because of where they reside. We believe that figure may be slightly higher based on the use we see in our libraries.

In fact, many of our members do not turn off the Wi-Fi signals at night after the library has closed because they know there is a need. We have examples where families will sit in their cars in the parking lot of the library after hours so that their children can complete their homework. In one library branch in particular in Southeast Ohio, 50% of their Wi-Fi usage is when the library is closed.

In addition, we now have more than 80 public library systems lending Wi-Fi hotspots to their patrons. Unfortunately, some of them are seeing wait times of 2-3 months. We

know that the digital divide and the need for access to broadband connectivity are real – we have not only the anecdotal stories to prove it, but the statistical data to support it. HB 13 will be a step forward in this effort by providing matching grants to local communities for last mile broadband expansion.

We would like to thank Rep. Carfagna and Rep. O'Brien for introducing this legislation and we strongly support its passage. Thank you for your time and we look forward to working with you as this bill moves forward in the legislative process.