Thursday, June 17, 2021

Dear Governor, Speaker, Senate President and Conference Committee Members:

The undersigned are members of the Greater Cleveland Digital Equity Coalition, a collective initiative by Cleveland’s corporate, philanthropic, local government, K-12 and higher education, health care, workforce, and community-based and advocacy organizations to narrow the digital divide in Greater Cleveland.

We are writing to express our disappointment at the Ohio Senate’s decision to strip all 2022-23 funding for broadband access programs from Am Sub House Bill 110, while adding problematic language regarding “government owned networks” that can only undermine the efforts of many Ohio communities, including ours, to promote broadband access, affordability and adoption. This amendment was added to the biennial budget bill with no hearings or public discussion.

We call on the leadership of the Ohio House and Ohio Senate, acting through the Conference Committee, to:

• Completely remove the language added to the bill by the Senate Finance Committee’s Amendment SC4546-1 (“Government-owned broadband networks”);  
• Restore the $190 million originally approved by the House for 2022-23 funding of BroadbandOhio’s Ohio Residential Broadband Expansion Program; and  
• Add significant additional funding for BroadbandOhio to support efforts by Ohio communities, urban as well as rural, to ensure that we have affordable internet options for lower income households, and to promote broadband adoption and digital literacy ($50M outlined in Investing in Ohio Initiative).

We also call on Governor DeWine, if the language added to the bill by the Senate Finance Committee’s Amendment SC4546-1 is not removed in the Conference Committee, to exercise his authority to remove it by means of a line-item-veto.
The Greater Cleveland Digital Equity Coalition is concerned that the effect of HB110, in its current form will be to prevent Cuyahoga County, the City of Cleveland, and numerous other local jurisdictions from implementing much-needed community broadband initiatives and public-private broadband partnerships, and even prevent our plans to leverage federal funds to address the county’s digital divide through broadband deployment, broadband adoption, and digital inclusion efforts.

We respectfully seek your support of our position.

Sincerely,

Wanda Davis, ASC3: Digital Literacy and Technology Training Center

Elaine Tso, Asian Services in Action (ASIA)

Kelsey Bergfeld, Advocates for Ohio’s Future

John Zitner, Friends of Breakthrough Schools

Councilmember Blaine Griffin, Cleveland City Council, Ward 6

Council President Kevin Kelley, Cleveland City Council, Ward 13

Mayor Frank G. Jackson, City of Cleveland

C. Curtis Timmons, Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Danielle Sydnor, Cleveland NAACP

Tania Menesse, Cleveland Neighborhood Progress

Forrest Faison, M.D., Cleveland State University

John W. Mitchell, CONNECT

Claire Rosacco, Cuyahoga Community College

County Executive Armond Budish, Cuyahoga County

Tracy R. Strobel, Cuyahoga County Public Library

Dorothy C. Baunach, DigitalC
Craig Arnold, Eaton

Jennifer Dodd, Ph.D., Educational Service Center of Northeast Ohio

Denise VanLeer, Fairfax Renaissance Development Corporation

Bethia Burke, Fund for our Economic Future

Allison L.E. Wallace, Greater Cleveland Neighborhood Centers Association

Baiju Shah, Greater Cleveland Partnership

Floun'say Caver, Ph.D., Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority

Jamar Doyle, Greater Collinwood Development Corporation

Jose Feliciano, Hispanic Roundtable

Grady Burrows, HIT in the CLE

Ray Leach, Jumpstart

Jenice Contreras, Northeast Ohio Hispanic Center for Economic Development (NEOHCED)

Bevin Bowersmith, PCs for People

Ronn Richard, The Cleveland Foundation

Lawrence Hatch, The Glenmede Trust Company, N.A.

Kurt Karakul, Third Federal Foundation

Jill Rizika, Towards Employment

August A. Napoli, United Way of Greater Cleveland
Marsha A. Mockabee, Urban League of Greater Cleveland

Craig Dorn, Youth Opportunities Unlimited