



January 22, 2021

Public Utilities Commission of Ohio
PUCO Docketing
180 E. Broad Street, 10th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Subject: Digital Infrastructure for Economic Development

Case No.: 19-1475-EL-RDR

Ohio offers an attractive business climate, as evidenced by the state's Top 10 ranking in [Chief Executive's Annual CEO Survey of Best States for Business](#) in each of the past three years. However, through our work to attract, expand, and retain businesses throughout the state, JobsOhio (along with regional and local partners) receives regular feedback about areas of the state where digital infrastructure and high-speed internet access is either non-existent or sub-standard.

Even before COVID-19, it was evident that certain areas of the state needed high-speed internet access to ensure economic opportunity and to enable advanced digital services for healthcare, education and other essential purposes. One of the many lessons learned during the pandemic-induced economic shock is that access to high-speed internet service remains essential for businesses and individuals to participate in the modern economy.

To that end, JobsOhio has been working with the DeWine-Husted Administration to expand access to high-speed internet throughout Ohio. Broader access, if achieved, would ensure the state's economic recovery is inclusive. JobsOhio as part of its stated mission is committed to exploring creative ways to help Ohio businesses and citizens fully participate in the growth of the economy.

Fortunately, numerous companies are evaluating ways to close the "digital divide" through new investment, innovation, and cost-competitive solutions for customers. We recognize that different companies can offer different solutions to help close the digital divide. Such efforts are complemented by major federal initiatives such as the [FCC's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund](#) (which recently awarded \$170 million to 11 winning bidders in Ohio over the next ten years).

AEP Ohio is an important economic development stakeholder in the state. The company shared its proposal (Case No. 19-1475-EL-RDR) with JobsOhio to use fiber to connect smart grid field devices in underserved high speed internet areas and allow third parties to use the excess fiber, along with available excess backhaul. According to AEP Ohio, additional fiber connections in these areas could provide an economical option for Internet Service Providers to increase the accessibility of high-speed internet service to local consumers.

While we have not conducted a cost-benefit analysis of the proposal, the broader aspiration of enabling increased access to high-speed internet at a competitive price is relevant to current economic development imperatives.

Respectfully submitted,

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Summary: Public Comment Public Comment of Andrew Deye, via website electronically filed
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