



**ILENE
SHAPIRO**
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

June 18, 2021

To: Ohio Senate and House Leadership, Governor DeWine, Lt. Governor Jon Husted

Access to high quality and affordable broadband is no longer a luxury. It is an essential service. Students need it to succeed in the classroom, businesses of all sizes need it to compete in a global economy, healthcare professionals need it to connect with their patients, our safety forces rely on it during every call for emergency service. No matter who you are or what you do, reliance on high-speed internet for critical daily activities is a unifying thread. Despite the growing need, access to high quality and affordable broadband remains unattainable for many, including many of our residents and businesses in the 31 communities of Summit County.

In response to the growing demand for high quality, affordable and secure broadband access, local governments around the state of Ohio, including the cities of Fairlawn and Hudson, have created their own broadband networks designed to meet the needs of their constituents. Recognizing the value and success of municipal broadband networks, Summit County recently began conversations with the City of Fairlawn on the concept of building a publicly owned fiber ring connecting all 31 of our communities. This ring would allow connectivity and communications that support public safety, education, economic development, remote work and a host of high tech needs within our communities. We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from our Mayors and Township Trustees, and were excited to undertake the next steps in the planning process when we heard about the Ohio Senate Omnibus Budget amendment that will effectively kill the municipal broadband networks currently operating and prohibit the creation of new municipal networks.

The amendment, added anonymously, at the last minute and without public comment, attempts to monopolize an essential service necessary to the health, public safety and welfare of Ohioans. It jeopardizes public safety services and health care providers who already rely on these existing fiber networks. It is a violation of home rule authority granted to local governments by Ohio's Constitution in support of private industries' bottom line and most importantly is a disservice to our residents who currently suffer with poor quality and lack of affordability.

We request the General Assembly completely remove the amendment inserted into HB 110. We welcome discussions with legislators about how to provide better broadband to the residents of Summit County and Ohio. The state budget is not the place to debate the issue, however. If enacted, this amendment will guarantee the State of Ohio will remain mired in mediocrity and will struggle to attract the types of businesses, technologies and opportunities we so desperately need. We urge you to eliminate this amendment.

Sincerely,

Ilene Shapiro, Summit County Executive