

THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

GARY L. MILLER
PRESIDENT

June 17, 2021

Dear Conference Committee Members:

I am writing to express my concerns about the Ohio Senate Omnibus Budget Amendment that proposes to modify Chapter 122 of the Ohio Revised Code to prevent political subdivisions from offering broadband service. The Comparison Document number is LOCCD39, and we request the House version of LOCCD39. The University of Akron's ability to extend internet access to students and employees off campus is critical to its mission as a public urban research university in a highly competitive digital economy.

The pandemic has made it clear that broadband is an essential service for students, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, to access higher education. Widely available, reliable broadband enables students to virtually register for classes, access email and interact with peers and instructors, access library materials and other resources, participate in online classes, conduct research and complete assignments, and more. If enacted, this amendment has the potential to harm our economically disadvantaged students, preventing them from acquiring the skills and knowledge required to compete in the 21st-century marketplace.

Over the past year, our employees, like most Ohioans, have relied upon high-speed broadband for employment, medical and other essential purposes. Public broadband promotes efficient business operations, enhances the security of personal and business data, advances the development of new technologies in areas such as autonomous transportation, provides access to health care services and information, and enables critical communication between public safety forces, including advanced 9-1-1 systems. In sum, an accessible broadband network is critical to promoting the education, prosperity, safety and welfare of residents of Akron and Summit County, making our region a more attractive place for people to live, learn and work.

Moreover, The University of Akron is serving as the fiscal agent for the South of Exchange Safety Initiative, for which Summit County received \$100,000 through the community project allocation of the FY21-22 state capital budget. The project will deploy upgraded street lighting with camera and software technology to provide a safer environment for the large number of students and residents living in this residential area as well as the police who patrol it. Our plan was to use the County's broadband capacity for the cameras and electronic surveillance, and this amendment would prevent us from doing so.

Therefore, The University of Akron opposes the Public-Owned Broadband Restriction Amendment contained in the Ohio Senate Omnibus Budget Amendment to the extent that it would modify Chapter 122 of the Ohio Revised Code to restrict public-owned broadband networks.

Sincerely,

Gary L. Miller
President

A PUBLIC URBAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITY, INSPIRED BY OUR PEOPLE, PLACE AND PROMISES.

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