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July 15, 2026

The Honorable David P. Joyce

U.S. House of Representatives
2065 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Joyce,

On behalf of the Howland Township Board of Trustees, I am writing to request your support for strengthening federal broadband infrastructure policies that protect local communities while continuing to expand high-speed internet service.

Like many communities across Ohio, Howland Township has experienced extensive fiber optic construction by multiple providers over the past several years. While we recognize the importance of expanding broadband access and appreciate the federal investment in this infrastructure, we have also experienced an increase in underground utility strikes that have disrupted electric, water, internet, and other essential services. These incidents have created significant public safety concerns and demonstrate the need for stronger construction standards and improved coordination.

Although Ohio townships have limited authority to regulate these projects once approved, local governments are often the first to respond when utility outages occur. Residents look to their local officials for answers, yet we have few regulatory tools available to prevent these incidents.

We respectfully ask for your support in advancing federal broadband policies that emphasize public safety and responsible construction practices. Specifically, we encourage Congress to consider:

- **Supporting federal "Dig Once" legislation** that encourages or requires the installation of shared conduit infrastructure whenever federally funded broadband projects are constructed within public rights-of-way. Installing adequate conduit capacity during the initial excavation would reduce repeated excavation by future providers, lower costs, protect underground utilities, minimize service disruptions, and improve public safety.

Howland Township Government Offices: 205 Niles-Cortland Rd. N.E. Warren, Ohio 44484

Howland Public Works Dept.: 3600 North River Rd. N.E. Warren, Ohio 44484

Howland Police/ Fire Offices: 169 Niles-Cortland Rd. N.E. Warren, Ohio 44484

- **Requiring enhanced utility verification procedures** for broadband projects receiving federal assistance, including the use of non-destructive excavation methods such as hydrovac or vacuum excavation to visually verify underground utilities before directional boring in high-risk or congested utility corridors. These practices align with nationally recognized excavation safety best practices developed by the Common Ground Alliance (CGA).
- **Establish enhanced safety standards and contractor accountability** through uniform construction practices, documented utility verification procedures, and quality assurance measures for federally funded broadband projects.
- **Strengthening coordination** among broadband providers, utility owners, utility locating services, contractors, and local governments throughout the planning and construction process.

Following a recent utility strike that affected dozens of residents, Howland Township convened a collaborative meeting with Lumos, utility locating representatives, contractors, and county officials. As a result, Lumos voluntarily implemented several immediate safety improvements, including expanded use of hydrovac and air-knife excavation, smaller utility-locate requests to improve marking accuracy, enhanced coordination among project partners, and increased field supervision. These actions demonstrate that meaningful improvements can be achieved when safety and collaboration are prioritized.

As Congress continues investing in broadband infrastructure, we respectfully request your support for policies that ensure these projects are completed safely and responsibly while protecting the communities they serve. Expanding broadband access and protecting critical underground infrastructure should be complementary objectives.

Thank you for your continued service to Ohio's Fourteenth Congressional District and for your consideration of these recommendations. We appreciate your leadership and would welcome the opportunity to discuss Howland Township's experiences as broadband deployment continues throughout our community.

Respectfully,

Howland Township Board of Trustees

By:

James Pantalone

Township Administrator