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July 14, 2026

The Honorable Nick Santucci

Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Representative Santucci,

As directed by the Howland Township Board of Trustees, I am writing to convey the Board's concerns about the public safety impacts of installing underground fiber-optic infrastructure and to respectfully request your assistance in advancing legislative solutions that better protect Ohio's residents, critical infrastructure, and local communities. This correspondence is transmitted pursuant to Resolution No. 2026-090, adopted by the Howland Township Board of Trustees on July 8, 2026, authorizing the Township Administrator to communicate the Board's concerns and legislative recommendations regarding underground fiber optic infrastructure installation safety.

The Board of Trustees recognizes the tremendous value that expanded broadband access brings to Ohio's residents, businesses, schools, healthcare providers, and public safety agencies. The Board fully supports continued investment in broadband infrastructure throughout our state. However, the Board has also witnessed firsthand the significant public safety concerns and operational challenges that can occur when underground utility excavation is not performed using the highest standards of care.

Over the past several years, Howland Township has experienced numerous utility strikes resulting from directional boring and excavation activities performed by multiple fiber optic contractors and subcontractors. These incidents have disrupted electric, natural gas, water, telecommunications, and internet services, damaged public and private infrastructure, and created unnecessary hardship for residents and businesses.

Every utility strike poses the risk of a serious public safety incident. Damage to underground electric, natural gas, water, or communications infrastructure places residents, utility workers, contractors, and first responders at unnecessary risk. Township officials, police officers,

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firefighters, road department personnel, and utility providers are expected to respond immediately to these incidents while working to restore essential services and maintain public safety.

The Board of Trustees is particularly concerned that Ohio townships are expected to manage the consequences of these incidents while possessing virtually no statutory authority to intervene when repeated utility strikes or unsafe excavation practices become evident. Local governments should not be placed in the position of protecting public safety without possessing reasonable tools to address documented hazardous conditions.

Following numerous meetings with Lumos and its contractors, the company has voluntarily committed to implementing enhanced safety measures designed to improve excavation practices, strengthen contractor accountability, increase field supervision, improve coordination with utility providers and local officials, and reduce future utility strikes. The Board of Trustees recognizes and appreciates Lumos' willingness to work collaboratively with the Township to improve these practices.

However, the Board believes these improvements should not depend upon voluntary action by individual companies. Rather, these proven practices should become minimum statewide standards applicable to every entity that performs underground fiber-optic infrastructure installation in Ohio.

Accordingly, the Howland Township Board of Trustees respectfully requests your consideration of legislation that would:

- Provide Ohio townships and other local governments with limited emergency authorities to issue temporary stop-work orders when repeated utility strikes, documented unsafe excavation practices, or imminent public safety hazards exist until corrective actions have been verified.
- Require the use of non-destructive excavation methods, including Hydro Excavation (Hydrovac), Air Knife technology, or equivalent approved methods, whenever excavation occurs within established tolerance zones surrounding existing underground utilities or other high-risk locations.
- Strengthening oversight of the Ohio Utilities Protection Service (OUPS) by establishing enhanced quality assurance standards for utility locating, requiring proper locating equipment and verification procedures, improving documentation requirements, and increasing accountability among utility owners and contract locating services.
- Establish uniform statewide excavation safety standards applicable to every fiber optic provider, contractor, and subcontractor performing underground utility installation throughout Ohio.
- Increase contractor accountability through enhanced reporting requirements, corrective procedures, and meaningful enforcement mechanisms following repeated utility strikes or demonstrated unsafe excavation practices.

The Board of Trustees does not request intervention that would delay or discourage broadband deployment. Instead, the Board believes Ohio can continue expanding critical communications infrastructure while ensuring that every project is completed safely, responsibly, and with consistent accountability.

The Howland Township Board of Trustees respectfully requests your leadership in sponsoring or supporting legislation that incorporates these recommendations. The Board welcomes the opportunity to meet with you, your staff, industry representatives, utility providers, the Ohio Utilities Protection Service, and fellow local government officials to further discuss these recommendations and assist in developing practical legislative solutions.

Thank you for your continued service to the residents of the 64th Ohio House District and for your commitment to strengthening Ohio's communities.

Respectfully,

HOWLAND TOWNSHIP BOARD OF TRUSTEES

By:

James Pantalone

Township Administrator

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