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Public Utilities Commission of Ohio
180 E Broad St
Columbus, OH 43215

December 21, 2020

RE: AEP Ohio's GridSmart Phase 3 Application Broadband Access Proposal
Case # 19-1475-EL-RDR

Dear Commissioners of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio:

Please accept this letter of support for AEP Ohio's GridSmart Phase 3 application on behalf of the Athens County Economic Development Council. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that broadband access is critical for students to learn, businesses to thrive and grow, and communities to prosper in rural Ohio. This proposal would provide for expanded broadband access in rural areas of the state and enable providers to better serve residents, businesses, schools, etc.

The need for reliable high-speed Internet services in rural Ohio will not subside when the pandemic ends. High-speed internet is critical for economic development of all types whether for factories and warehouses to improve efficiencies, healthcare services like telehealth, or equity in education.

Our communities have been left with limited options because extending services to Appalachian Ohio has not been a priority. AEP Ohio's plan can help eliminate a significant barrier to access by allowing internet service providers to tap into their fiber network. As Athens County's economic development office, we appreciate that this plan would be subject to local oversight and would create more opportunities for our part of the state as we continue to try and bridge the digital divide.

Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Mollie Fitzgerald

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Mollie Fitzgerald'.

Executive Director
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Summary: Public Comment of Mollie Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Athens County Economic Development Council, via website, electronically filed by Docketing Staff on behalf of Docketing