BUCKEYE • HILLS regional council

September 21, 2022

Alan Davidson, Assistant Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20230

Assistant Secretary Davidson,

Buckeye Hills Regional Council fully supports Horizon's proposal for the Enabling Middle Mile Infrastructure Program. Horizon is proposing a comprehensive approach to constructing middle mile infrastructure in areas of the state where broadband is lacking. The Horizon plan would establish an open access network that can be leveraged to bring additional needed last-mile connections to unserved and underserved areas of the state. Buckeye Hills strongly supports the project and its ultimate goal of closing the digital divide in Ohio.

Buckeye Hills Regional Council is a Local Development District, an Economic Development District, and a council of governments dedicated to improving the lives of residents in Southeast Ohio. Since 1968, Buckeye Hills has worked collaboratively with elected officials across Athens, Hocking, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Noble, Perry, and Washington counties to grow strong communities through its five divisions: Aging & Disability, Community Development, Planning, Population Health, and Transportation.

Due to low population density and the rough terrain of the Appalachian foothills, internet service providers have long been unwilling to invest private funds in the Buckeye Hills region. Creating new open access middle mile infrastructure could help to alleviate those costs for providers and make Southeast Ohio more attractive to investment.

In addition to facilitating private investment, Horizon's plan will enable more efficient use of public dollars throughout the region. With the historic investment in broadband infrastructure from the Federal government and the State of Ohio, it is vital that those funds are used efficiently to connect unserved and underserved households. With the middle mile investments proposed by Horizon, those funds could stretch much further than before. For the over 77,000 unserved households across the region—including Perry County, where no open middle mile infrastructure currently exists—the Horizon plan represents a life-changing investment. This investment has the potential to help bring equitable access to the services and opportunities that our residents need and to close the digital divide for a region long plagued by lack of connectivity.

Sincerely,

Chasity Schmelzenbach
Executive Director

Serving Athens, Hocking, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Noble, Perry and Washington Counties in Southeast Ohio
1400 Pike Street | Marietta, OH 45750 | 1.800.331.2644 | 740.373.6400 | fax: 740.373.1594

buckeyehills.org