

January 18, 2010

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Ministerial Alliance Against the Digital Divide (MAADD), we are writing to ask you to support House Bill 276, the Ohio Telecom Modernization Act. This legislation will bring thousands of jobs to the Buckeye state, expand Lifeline services for the poor, protect consumers and bring state of the art broadband investment to communities that need it most.

MAADD is a 25,000+ member next generation civil rights organization devoted to bridging the digital divide and promoting personal and economic development in low income and minority communities across the county. Our newly formed Ohio Chapter has already attracted over 300 ministers from across the state that are working on a grassroots level to provide underserved neighborhoods with access to the Internet and to bring Ohio minority communities together to participate in social activism on a massive scale.

As you know, Ohio has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country with over 10 percent of the population unemployed. This statistic is even higher in the African American communities where a highly disproportionate percentage of the population is struggling to find employment in a depressed economy. House Bill 276 is the vehicle that will jump start Ohio's economy by bringing thousands of jobs to every corner of the state. These are jobs that our communities and our people desperately need.

In addition to jobs, House Bill 276 will bring state of the art broadband investment to hundreds of Ohio communities. Increased broadband investment creates unlimited potential – it can allow underserved neighborhoods to promote economic development through the establishment of minority small businesses that hire locally. It can provide Ohioans with better access to healthcare, education, and jobs. And it can give the voiceless a voice in the political process so that they can have an impact on issues that affect their everyday lives.

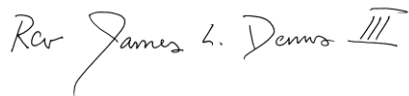
According to testimony by the Ohio Conference of the NAACP, a recent Communications Workers of America report estimates that every \$5 billion invested in broadband infrastructure creates over 97,000 jobs. House Bill 276 puts the state's priorities in order as it eliminates resources spent on managing outdated regulations and allows those resources to be used to create jobs and increase broadband investment.

Finally, House Bill 276 expands the Lifeline telephone assistance program for low income individuals. Today, only people served by a few large phone companies can obtain assistance on their phone bills through the Lifeline program. Under House Bill 276, low income consumers in every part of the state will be eligible for assistance.

Moreover, the legislation will allow more people to qualify for the program as it increases the qualification threshold from 135% of the federal poverty guidelines to 150%; allows any individual that qualifies for federal poverty programs to automatically qualify for the Lifeline program; and mandates that phone companies provide eligible consumers with the maximum discount available. The expansion of the Lifeline program will help ease some of the financial burden for many people that are desperately struggling to make ends meet in these tough economic times.

With so many benefits to the state of Ohio, we strongly encourage you to vote, “yes” on House Bill 276 - legislation that is so important to improving the lives of your constituents. Please contact us at 866-297-0164 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rev James L. Demus III". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name of the same individual.

Reverend James L. Demus III
Founder and Co-Director

Reverend William L. Land
President, Ohio Chapter