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October 18, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W., Room TW-B204
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Reply to Comments by Buckeye Hills Regional Council Regarding the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund WC Docket Nos. 19-126 and 10-90

Madam Secretary:

In reply to comments submitted by the Buckeye Hills Regional Council on September 19, 2019, we support any and all efforts to close the digital divide in Appalachia.

We are a nonprofit economic development organization that promotes and finances economic development in Perry County, Ohio through the micro enterprise business sector. Perry County is in the heart of Appalachia and has very little economic development. Seventy-seven percent of our labor force is employed outside of Perry County. This high labor migration rate is in large part to the lack of local employment opportunities due to the lack of reliable broadband Internet access.

Potential new businesses explore the possibility of establishing in Perry County, but nearly all decide to locate elsewhere. The single most significant impediment to locating in Perry County is our Internet access. Our agency, in cooperation with Rural Action, has survey results and data to support this assertion. We will be delighted to forward the data to you, if requested.

It is unreasonable and absurd to expect any business to locate in Perry County and, by extension, rural areas of Appalachia, without reliable and affordable broadband access. It is unreasonable and absurd that a significant region of the United States is expected to improve its contributions to the economy when laboring under Internet access has become obsolete. It is unreasonable and absurd that this region must campaign to have the same Internet access as small neighboring Appalachian cities.

If the Commission hopes to foster economic development, it must provide the minimum tools with which to do so.

Sincerely,
Fritzie Nitschke
Board President, S.P.I.C.E.