A JOINT COMMUNICATION FROM

SUMMIT COUNTY

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November 23, 2026

RE: Opposition to Proposed Utility Relocation Reimbursement Legislation

Dear Chair Holmes, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Rader, and Members of the House Energy Committee,

On behalf of Summit County, we are writing to express our strong concerns regarding the proposed amendment addressing utility relocation costs. This follows the November 19, 2026, joint letter submitted by the Ohio Municipal League, Ohio Mayors Alliance, County Commissioners Association of Ohio, County Engineers Association of Ohio, Ohio Municipal Electric Association, Ohio Township Association, and Ohio Contractors Association. As Summit County's elected representatives regarding this matter, we wanted to independently emphasize the significant financial and operational consequences this legislation would impose on county governments.

Although these provisions are not currently included in Senate Bill 294, we understand efforts are underway to introduce them through an amendment to that legislation or other pending legislation.

The stated concerns of telecommunications and cable providers should not be used to justify a sweeping change to utility relocation policy. We understand that one of the stated goals of the communication companies who are lobbying to get this legislation passed is to avoid having to pay to relocate lines due to city "beautification" projects. The proposed amendment reaches far beyond any category of municipal beautification project and would impose new reimbursement obligations on counties, cities, and townships for a wide range of public improvements, including road, bridge, drainage, and safety projects. Whatever approach the General Assembly considers for municipal beautification projects, road, bridge, stormwater, and sanitary sewer projects should be expressly excluded from any new reimbursement mandate.

Private companies should not profit from public property and then expect taxpayers to pay their operating expenses.

Utility and telecommunications companies are granted access to publicly owned rights-of-way to install and operate their infrastructure, often without paying for that access or contributing to the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the roads and property they occupy. That access comes with responsibilities. The longstanding expectation has been that these companies relocate their facilities at their own expense, when necessary to accommodate public improvements.

County transportation projects are undertaken to maintain and improve essential public infrastructure. Utility relocations are frequently necessary to complete roadway, bridge, drainage, and safety improvements. These are not optional expenses or enhancements; they are integral to delivering the public improvements counties are responsible for providing. County taxpayers should not be required to subsidize the relocation of privately owned infrastructure simply because a utility's facilities conflict with a necessary public project.

Local governments already bear substantial costs associated with utility coordination and delays.

County governments dedicate significant staff time, engineering resources, and taxpayer dollars to coordinating utility relocations throughout the planning and construction of public improvement projects. Despite years of advance planning and coordination, utility providers repeatedly fail to relocate their facilities on schedule. These delays extend construction timelines, increase contractor costs, and expose projects to rising material and labor expenses due to inflation.

Taxpayers already bear these additional costs. Requiring counties to reimburse utility companies would compound the problem, rewarding untimely coordination while placing yet another financial burden on the public agencies responsible for delivering essential infrastructure improvements.

The expansion of fiber and telecommunications infrastructure has created additional challenges.

Multiple fiber-optic and telecommunications providers are increasingly competing for space within already congested public rights-of-way, often alongside existing storm sewer systems, gas lines, electric lines, and water infrastructure. Poor coordination and overlapping installations increase the potential for utility conflicts and accidental strikes, including damage to gas lines. These incidents create safety risks, costly repairs, service disruptions, construction delays, and additional burdens on county engineering and construction staff.

If telecommunications and cable companies are to be treated as utilities for purposes of occupying public rights-of-way and receiving reimbursement from public funds, they must also be subject to the regulatory requirements, oversight, safety standards, permitting obligations, and relocation responsibilities imposed on regulated utilities. They should not be permitted to claim the benefits and privileges of utility status while avoiding the corresponding obligations. Non-utilities should not be in our Right-of way. Companies that are not willing or able to meet the standards required of utility providers should not be granted unrestricted access to publicly owned rights-of-way; they should obtain their own easements.

This proposal shifts private business expenses onto taxpayers.

Counties operate with finite budgets and are responsible for maintaining roads, bridges, drainage systems, and other essential infrastructure. Every dollar diverted to reimburse private utility companies is a dollar that cannot be invested in road improvements, bridge repairs, safety enhancements, and other public services. The proposed mandate provides no corresponding funding source and does nothing to address the underlying problems of utility coordination and project delays.

We strongly oppose extending utility relocation reimbursement requirements to counties, cities, and townships. Any legislation addressing reimbursement for utility relocations must expressly exclude road, bridge, stormwater and sanitary sewer projects and preserve and retain local government's existing authority to require utility providers to relocate their facilities at their own expense when necessary to accommodate county road, bridge, drainage, and other essential infrastructure improvements.

Public rights-of-way are built and maintained for the benefit of the public. They should not become a taxpayer-funded subsidy for private utility and telecommunications companies.

We urge the General Assembly to protect county taxpayers and ensure that county transportation and infrastructure projects are not subjected to these proposed reimbursement requirements. We urge the General Assembly to reject any effort to shift private utility relocation costs to county taxpayers and to ensure that companies seeking access to public rights-of-way are subject to the same meaningful standards and responsibilities expected of regulated utility providers.

Respectfully,

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