

Catherine Moyer, CEO/GM of Pioneer Communications
House Energy, Utilities and Telecommunication Committee

Proponent for HB 2618

February 13, 2020

Good morning Chairman Seiwert and members of the House Energy, Utilities and Telecommunication Committee. I am Catherine Moyer, the CEO and General Manager of Pioneer Communication in Ulysses, Kansas and I am also representing the Kansas Rural Independent Telecommunication Coalition (KRITC) and I appear as a proponent of HB 2618.

The Legislature created the Broadband Task Force in 2018 to review the status of broadband availability in Kansas and come up with recommendations. I served on the Broadband Task Force with Chairman Seiwert and was also named chair of one of the subcommittees. Each task force met twice over the summer/fall of 2019 and the full task force met in December 2019. The subcommittees chair or vice chair reviewed these recommendations with you last month.

I was able to attend all these subcommittee meetings and so I and other task force members heard from a variety of people that pointed out that broadband is no longer a luxury item for residents or companies. It has become necessity for business, education, health care, agriculture and our own personal lives.

HB 2618 reflects the views expressed by the Task Force members and those that presented that asked for Kansas to do more to address the digital divide. HB 2618 would allow Kansas to join approximately 30 other states that have established broadband programs to help address some of the gaps in service that exist in our state. Just by establishing a statewide broadband office and program, Kansas will be able to apply for and hopefully receive some federal funding that we are not receiving at this time. Also, it would create a place for cities, providers and any other interested person to get timely and accurate information about the various federal programs that are available.

I appear before you in support of HB 2618 because it establishes a broadband program that incorporates a number of themes that were widely supported by the task force members: 1) housing the program in the Department of Commerce; 2) creates a challenge process so the funds will not be used to duplicate what a what is already deployed by a previous provider; 3) allows the Department of Commerce the flexibility to set minimum speed standards so that

these standards can change as technology changes. In our discussions with the Department of Commerce, they also want to establish rules so that the state funding will not go to any area that is currently receiving other funding, which would mirror the desire of the federal programs to not duplicate funding in any area.

HB 2618 fits well with the FORWARD bill (HB 2588) which focuses on addressing infrastructure issues. While the focus of the bill is our highway system, the bill puts \$5m into a broadband infrastructure grant program that will operate in cooperation with the Department of Commerce. While funding will always be important, I would encourage you to not focus on the amount it will take to solve all the issues immediately but instead focus on starting the process immediately. Iowa illustrates what can be done with a smaller investment. Iowa implemented a broadband program and spent \$5m in 2019, which funded 17 rural broadband projects. Iowa is not unusual for the beginning of a program, most of the programs started with smaller funding and have grown as the programs have proven to be beneficial to the economic and social welfare of the state.

Establishing a broadband program is a good step for Kansas and I appreciate Chairman Seiwert's hard work in drafting this bill that will help bring better connectivity to Kansans across the state.

I respectfully ask you pass HB 2618 out favorably. I am happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.