

March 9, 2018

The Honorable Julia Lynn, Chair  
Senate Commerce Committee

Reference: HB 2701 As Amended — Establishing the statewide broadband expansion task force

Good morning Madame Chair Lynn and Committee Members. My name is Ernest Kutzley and I am the Advocacy Director for AARP Kansas. AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization with more than 315,000 members living in Kansas. AARP is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for all as we age. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 2701 as amended.

Broadband technology allows users to access the Internet and the growing list of services and devices that utilize high-speed Internet access. Among other uses, consumers use broadband connections for voice, video, and other data services. An increasing percentage of Americans have a broadband connection at home, although older Americans continue to lag behind other age groups. Broadband technology enables real-time interaction and communication that is almost as precise and expressive as a face-to-face.

Broadband access is often necessary to use new technologies that improve quality of life for people of all ages and that allow people to age in place. Thus ensuring access, affordability, and training is essential to enable older people to benefit fully from new technologies. Over six in ten adults age 65 and older are online, but just over half of those 65-plus have a broadband connection at home, according to the Pew Research Center. Above age 75, even fewer adults are online and have broadband in the home. And access is not enough; in order to take full advantage of the benefits of technology, people need to develop relevant digital skills, and some may need support to do so.

All people need to connect with one another and be part of a wider community, but for older adults, staying connected is especially important. Gerontologists assert that active engagement with life (e.g., continuing with productive activities and maintaining social ties) is critical for successful aging. Indeed, older adults often find more opportunities for enhanced working, learning, and social contact in later life than ever before, particularly if they learn to use new technologies that can connect them with other people.

With its greater speed, broadband can be a powerful tool for addressing the needs of an aging population. It can facilitate access to health care services, social contacts, employment, recreation, civic engagement, entertainment, and other activities that contribute to successful aging. For example, a broadband connection that can support monitoring devices and interactive video makes home health care a viable option for many consumers; this particularly helps individuals who have limited mobility, are too sick to travel, or live in rural areas far from health care facilities. The Veterans Health Administration's national home tele-health program provides care for veterans via remote monitoring and videoconferencing. Data gathered from participating veterans who have at least one of six chronic conditions—diabetes, chronic heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder—showed high levels of patient satisfaction with the program and, compared with ordinary modalities, significant reductions in the number of bed days of care and the number of hospital admissions.

Growing evidence suggests that patients with chronic conditions can successfully use mobile data communications to help them maintain healthy lifestyles or modify behaviors such as smoking, overeating, and lack of exercise. For instance, studies show that text messaging and cell phone applications help patients manage disease. For such options to be available, however, accessible high-speed networks must be able to support bandwidth-intensive applications for a rapidly growing user base.

Regulators should undertake a comprehensive review of prior decisions and policies that have adversely affected the deployment, subscription, and use of broadband and take appropriate actions to reverse such decisions or policies or otherwise mitigate their effects.

Policymakers should:

- ensure that every household has access to affordable and reliable high-speed broadband and have the ability to choose from multiple, competing broadband networks;
- encourage innovative approaches for the delivery of high-speed broadband services;
- fund and promote large-scale pilot projects that provide high-speed connectivity to underserved populations—including those who face financial or physical impediments, such as older people and individuals with disabilities or low incomes, enabling them to gain access to promising tele-health, personal-health, and independent-living technologies.

Policymakers at all levels of government should look for opportunities to promote and improve the usability of broadband-enabled technologies.

Therefore, we respectfully request that this committee support HB 2701 as amended.

Thank you.