

Testimony of IdeaTek -- Support for HB 2588 -- February 18, 2020

IdeaTek Telcom has been headquartered in Buhler, Kansas for 20 years. We are a competitive service provider of fiber optic broadband. We have used nearly all private investment to build over 2,600 miles of fiber optic infrastructure all over our great state. We've connected rural homes, farms, schools, cell towers, and other service providers to longterm sustainable internet in areas other providers would dare not go. We believe we are experts in the field of closing the digital divide in broadband in rural Kansas.

HB 2588 represents Kansas' dedication to the transportation infrastructure of our state. As a broadband provider, IdeaTek is especially excited to see an acknowledgment in this bill of the importance of broadband as part of that infrastructure and our brief comments today reflect a focus on the broadband provisions of this bill. Just like the critical importance of our physical transportation infrastructure, broadband is now the critical virtual transportation infrastructure of America. Many rural Kansans have been left without the digital roads needed to live and thrive in our modern world. Therefore, we lend our support this bill and its efforts toward addressing and increasing broadband availability to all Kansans.

We provide specific recommendations and comments for HB 2588 below:

Grant Support

Creating a grant program as outlined in SB 375, which is competitively available to all broadband operators on an equal playing field, is an effective way to increase broadband deployment. The funding proposed is short of what is needed to bridge the digital divide in Kansas, but it's a positive step that benefits underserved Kansas residents.

Broadband Conduit

We recommend adding clarifying language in this bill instructing KDOT to deploy broadband conduit that has the capacity to support multiple broadband service providers. Further, we recommend KDOT develop fair and competitively neutral provider access procedures to access existing and new KDOT conduit or fiber optic cables, and to explicitly authorize KDOT to lease such excess conduit and fiber optic cables at cost.

Establish an Industry Advisory Committee

Finally, we recommend KDOT form a committee of broadband industry representatives to advise the Secretary on matters of coordinating KDOT resources and policy to further the deployment of broadband in Kansas.

We appreciate KDOT and the Legislature offering solutions to partner with providers to expand needed broadband to Kansas communities. IdeaTek supports HB 2588.

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