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Testimony on HB 2618

PROPONENT

Senate Utilities Committee

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Chairman Masterson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB2618, which would establish a state broadband deployment grant program to bring greater broadband connectivity to under-served areas in Kansas. AT&T supports this proposal because we agree that access to the internet is essential for all Kansans' progress and productivity.

AT&T recognizes that many Kansans are still living without a high-speed internet connection. To address this need, AT&T is committed to working collaboratively with all levels of government, private industry and customers to expand and enhance our networks to reach Kansas' rural areas. In support of this effort, I'm proud to have served on the state's broadband expansion planning task force, which was tasked with identifying opportunities to expand broadband infrastructure and increase statewide access to broadband services.

AT&T is working with similar federal programs designed to expand broadband access in rural communities nationwide.

For example, through the Connect America Fund (CAF) initiative, we're committed to offering internet service to 1.1 million additional rural homes and small businesses nationally by the end of 2020. In Kansas, we've expanded high-speed internet service to underserved rural areas of the state, now reaching more than 28,000 homes and small business locations in parts of 67 Kansas counties in AT&T Kansas' service territories —and we are on track to reach a total of over 35,000 locations by the end of this year.

We applaud the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for moving forward to develop CAF's successor – the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, which will inject \$20.4 billion into high-speed broadband networks in rural areas over the next decade. The RDOF will encourage delivery of high-speed internet access to parts of rural America, including Kansas, and provide a sensible path for companies to further expand broadband networks into communities that are often the most challenging to reach. We look forward to working with the FCC and other stakeholders to advance the Commission's goals of expanding broadband access.

In continuing work to deliver broadband service to rural Kansas, AT&T has announced plans to expand access to ultra-fast connectivity over our Next Generation Fixed Wireless Internet service using the Citizens Broadband Radio Service spectrum band. This "innovation band"

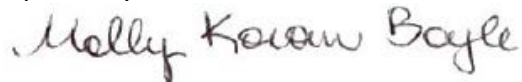
will allow us to bring greater network capacity and enhanced connectivity to rural communities.

Finally, we are expanding access to mobile wireless broadband in rural communities through the buildout of FirstNet, the nationwide communications platform created for and dedicated to public safety. In addition to deploying Band 14 spectrum, we are building new sites in rural Kansas where public safety stakeholders identified a need for the connectivity.

As we continue our work with state and local leaders, like you, to deliver greater broadband access, we are mindful that the benefits of high-speed connectivity are only achieved if people with access subscribe to the service. There is often a gap between availability and subscribership, which emphasizes the importance of efforts to encourage broadband adoption to correspond with efforts to expand broadband access. For example, our data consistently demonstrate that as available internet speeds increase, subscribership decreases. So, while faster service may be available, consumers are not necessarily subscribing to those faster speeds. As policymakers continue develop broadband policy, we encourage them to consider these trends and incorporate policies that can help address low adoption rates in rural areas where connectivity is available.

We know that improved access to broadband can fuel economic development and improved healthcare and education. We are committed to continuing our work with you, the industry and our customers to expand broadband access while encouraging adoption to realize its benefits.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Molly Kocour Boyle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Molly Kocour Boyle
President – AT&T Kansas