

Jarad Falk
Charter Communications
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Oral Proponent – HB 2618
Senate Utilities Committee

Chairman Masterson,

My name is Jarad Falk, and I am a Sr. Director of Government Affairs at Charter Communications. Charter Communications is a connectivity company providing broadband, video, mobile, and voice services to over 29 million customers in 41 states - including more than 100,000 customers in 25 communities in Johnson, Wyandotte and Leavenworth Counties in Kansas - under the brand name Spectrum. We're driving innovation and expanding access to broadband to ensure our customers receive the information and entertainment they want and need to succeed in today's hyper-connected world.

Charter Communications supports the creation of a Kansas Broadband Grant Program in HB 2618, but would suggest a few changes to ensure taxpayer dollars are spent in a prudent manner.

First, the Legislature should ensure that taxpayer dollars are only used in unserved areas of the state. Any taxpayer funds used in areas that already have access to high speed broadband are wasted. For this reason, an unserved area should be defined in HB 2618 as an area without access to wireline or fixed wireless broadband internet service of speeds at least 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload - and grants should be awarded only in unserved areas. To further ensure grant funds are not awarded in areas that already have access to broadband, HB 2618 should also include a more robust challenge process. Specifically, the bill should be amended so that if the Office of Broadband Development is required to deny a grant application if they determine a provider currently provides, has begun construction to provide, or commits to provide broadband internet service (without grant funds).

Second, the grant program should not provide a grant in an area where another federal, state or local grant has already been awarded – if the grant recipient has committed to building out the area with such grant. This will prevent double-dipping and ensure state funds are efficiently used to provide high speed broadband access to the more unserved Kansans.

Third, if taxpayer dollars are to be used to subsidize broadband expansion, the Legislature should ensure that the infrastructure deployed meets a minimum speed requirement (25/3 Mbps) and is scalable to higher speeds in the future. Without such safeguards, taxpayer funds could be wasted at the time of deployment if substandard infrastructure is utilized, and in the future, when the infrastructure would need to be replaced to keep pace with technological innovations if such infrastructure is not scalable.

Fourth, the Department of Commerce should promulgate rules and regulations in advance of accepting grant applications to provide additional guidance for applicants and to ensure the rules conform to HB 2618.

Finally, to ensure the grant program is working as the Legislature intended, the program should sunset in 5 years.



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