

To: Senate Utilities Committee

From: Erik Sartorius, Executive Director

Date: March 11, 2020

RE: Testimony in favor of House Bill 2618

The League appreciates the opportunity to appear before this committee and testify in favor of House Bill 2618. A grant program for the expansion of broadband services is long overdue in Kansas.

Our cities have myriad stories of the challenges their residents, businesses, and students face in accomplishing day to day tasks. Some of these stories involve time-consuming strategies to beat these challenges. In one city, students bicycle down to the city library after dinner to sit outside in order to connect to the wifi and complete school assignments. A business owner in an urban area had to resort to having three different wireless phone subscriptions to use as hotspots to get work done at home.

Having been participants on the Statewide Broadband Expansion Planning Task Force, we have heard firsthand about these and other challenges created by lacking or subpar broadband service in the state. Some may joke that this is about having their Netflix not being jittery or their video games not hanging up. The reality is that broadband can determine whether a home-based business can survive, data critical to efficient agriculture production can be transferred, telemedicine can reach out to those lacking a local specialist, and students can take classes otherwise unavailable to them.

House Bill 2618 is a good faith motion forward by the state. Waiting for the perfect plan just means more waiting. The task of encouraging and developing broadband accessibility for all Kansans is a daunting one – so enormous that it has been easier to ignore it than contemplate tackling it. House Bill 2618 will not result in an overnight transformation of Kansans' access to broadband; it will, however, show a tangible commitment to the future.

We ask that the committee support House Bill 2618 and report it favorably to the full Senate.