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Date: March 11, 2020  
To: Senator Ty Masterson, Chairman, Senate Utilities Committee  
From: Shahira Stafford, Kansas Cooperative Council  
**RE: House Bill 2618, establishing a state broadband grant program under department of commerce to encourage broadband deployment statewide**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2618 on behalf of the Kansas Cooperative Council (KCC). The KCC is a voluntary trade association representing all forms of cooperatively-structured businesses in Kansas. Its mission is to promote and advance the interests of agricultural, utility, credit, and consumer cooperatives and their members through legislation, regulatory efforts, and education. Simply, cooperatives differ from other businesses because they are member-owned, member-controlled, democratically-governed, and profits are returned back to the patrons.

Farmer cooperatives contribute directly to the financial and business health of the rural communities in which they and their members operate. Their activities, earnings, and patronage dividends directly support the rural Kansas economy. State policies must continue providing rural communities with the tools necessary to sustain and promote economic well-being.

For example, broadband infrastructure is essential to keeping rural Kansas connected to the world. Broadband represents the critical link that enables agricultural business, teleworking, distance learning, telemedicine, and even relocation of businesses to rural areas. Yet hundreds of rural Kansans lack access to even basic broadband speeds that are taken for granted in urban areas today. Access to affordable high-speed internet is vital to ensure the future of rural communities and their economies.

The KCC thanks the Legislature for recognizing this need and taking the steps toward improving access to reliable broadband for all Kansans. We believe that the provisions in this bill will build upon those efforts by offering grants to rural electric cooperatives and other providers looking to deploy broadband services in the communities in which our members work and live.

For these reasons, the KCC stands in support of HB 2618 and also asks that the Legislature secure the appropriate funding proposed in the FORWARD transportation plan to support this broadband expansion. Thank you for allowing us to comment today.