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**Testimony before the Senate Utilities Committee Regarding Broadband
Written Testimony in Support of HB 2701**

Provided by Christy Hopkins, President
western Kansas Rural Economic Development Alliance

Thank you for allowing the opportunity for our organization to share our members' support for HB2701. The western Kansas Rural Economic Development Alliance (wkREDA) is a coalition of people in 55 western Kansas counties who work together for the common economic good of western Kansas. Our membership, primarily county economic development directors, maintain a collaborative affiliation with each other so we can achieve our individual and collective rural development goals.

The internet is a wonderful tool for rural development. It allows businesses in rural areas to market their products and services, enables citizens to work remotely for out-of-area companies, and provides opportunities for businesses to provide products and services to residents while staying on the cutting edge of technology and innovation. Adequate broadband is necessary to grow economic opportunities but required to keep existing businesses in our community. All industries that utilize new technologies need reliable access to broadband. The organizations our small communities rely on - agriculture, medicine, education, finance, local government, utilities – need suitable infrastructure to deliver the best service.

We are excited about the opportunity for this statewide task force and in preparation for this testimony asked our members to share information about the availability of broadband in their communities. As wkREDA, we struggle to make definitive statements on the quality of broadband in our region because it varies so widely – from city to city, county to county, from in-town to in the country, by provider, and with countless other factors.

The internet and access to it is an amazing economic development tool for our state – when and where it works. While some areas (mainly in Northwest & North Central Kansas) have access to 100 MPBS speeds, some have little to no access to broadband. Basic broadband, with download speeds up to 3 MBPS is widely available, but in many cases, this will not begin to serve the needs of our businesses.

As the broadband task force is formed, we would ask that careful attention be given to the companies and individuals who fill those seats. As the members of the task force are selected, we request consideration be given to finding members who can serve a dual role to also represent the needs of rural development. There are rural telecommunications companies such as NexTech and Golden Belt Telephone that have long been involved in economic development and whose members have the ability to speak for communities beyond their direct territory and to the needs of companies and industry. Additionally, Midwest Energy is an electric cooperative that has been active in economic development and would be capable members of the task force.