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**Proponent Testimony
HB 2618 – Establishing the state broadband deployment grant program.**

**House Committee on Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications
February 13, 2020**

**Presented by Doug Shepherd, Vice President of Management Consulting Services
Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc.**

Chairman Seiwert and members of the House Committee on Energy, Utilities and Telecommunications, thank you for the opportunity to appear today on behalf of Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. (KEC) and our members to comment in support of HB 2618. I am Doug Shepherd and I serve as the Vice President of Management Consulting Services for KEC.

KEC is the Kansas statewide service organization for 27 electric distribution cooperatives and three generation and transmission cooperatives. Formed on August 18, 1941, and headquartered in Topeka, KEC represents the interests of and provides needed services and programs to the electric co-ops that serve Kansans. Our major programming areas include advocacy, education, communications and safety/loss control.

As you know, the legislature approved creation of the Statewide Broadband Expansion Planning Task Force two years ago. Electric cooperatives had a seat on the task force and Chairman Seiwert and this committee played a significant role in providing that opportunity to us, and we certainly appreciate that. I served as the electric co-op representative on the task force.

Our electric cooperatives understand the need to ensure reliable, high-speed broadband service is available across the state. Our member cooperatives are uniquely situated to help facilitate that deployment. For some, that will mean serving as a direct provider, while others may partner with the local communications providers. Co-ops may also be a financial partner by accessing grant dollars available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture or the Federal Telecommunications Commission.

The decisions regarding the role an electric cooperative may play in fostering broadband deployment in their community will depend on the needs of the members and whether those needs are adequately met by current providers. We do anticipate that there will be opportunities for co-ops to assist in deployment in many areas of the state in the coming years.

We know that deployment is expensive so funding will be key to extending quality broadband service across the state. We appreciate this bill and the work that went into crafting it. It is a positive step toward fostering expansion. It will also be important to secure appropriate funding to support this program.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our support for HB 2618 and respectfully request this committee act favorably on the bill. I will stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Thank you.