

Testimony of IdeaTek in Support of HB 2618

IdeaTek Telcom has been headquartered in Buhler, Kansas for nearly 15 years. We are a competitive service provider of broadband and voice services that does not receive funding from the Kansas Universal Service Fund. We have used nearly all private investment to build over 2,400 miles of fiber optic infrastructure all over our great state. We've connected rural homes, farms, schools, cell towers, and other service providers to long term sustainable internet in areas other providers would dare not go, and we are focused now more than ever on the deployment of fiber optic broadband solutions for the underserved in Kansas. We believe we are experts in the field of closing the digital divide in broadband in our state.

IdeaTek supports the efforts of all companies working to deploy sustainable broadband to underserved residents, students, and businesses across Kansas. Many rural Kansans have been left behind in the digital divide and are unable to live in the modern world. This bill is another good step towards addressing and increasing Kansas' position in broadband availability.

Creating a grant program, which is competitively available to all broadband operators on an equal playing field and potentially to be matched with funding proposed in HB 2588 and SB 375 (FORWARD), is an effective way to increase broadband deployment. The funding proposed is short of what providers need, but it's a positive step that benefits underserved Kansas residents.

Recommendations

There are three changes, for the committee's consideration, we believe would improve the bill:

1: On page 2, lines 25-27, there should be stricter language that requires incumbents to have verified, or previously initiated, plans to deploy broadband, versus a competitor prompting them to do so through the grant process. It's unfair for a competitor to expend time and resources developing a plan, pursuing and potentially being awarded grants, and having the incumbent simply say they will do it instead.

Suggested amendment to Section 1(d)(3)(C): ~~has~~ *has provided evidence of shovel ready plans committed to providing* provide broadband internet service to retail customers within the proposed area within the timeframe proposed by the applicant *and has committed to providing broadband internet service to retail customers within the proposed area within the timeframe proposed by the applicant.*

2: The Office of Broadband Deployment should receive authority and direction from the Legislature to advance concepts in the Broadband Task Force Final Report, such as drafting a broadband goal, addressing right-of-way access and other issues.

3: There is no current qualification criteria or definition of "Broadband". Qualifying areas should be defined as those unserved or underserved areas identified using the Kansas Connected Nation Map, and the federal standard and the newly adopted speed standard of the Kansas Broadband Deployment Taskforce of 25 Mbps download / 3 Mbps upload.

We commend Chairman Seiwert and members of the Committee for addressing this critical issue for Kansas. We support HB 2618 and encourage your support with the above changes.