

**To:** Senate Utilities Committee, Sen. Rob Olson, Chairman

**From:** John Donley, Kansas Farm Bureau

**Date:** March 20, 2018

**Re:** HB 2701 – Rural Broadband Task Force

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Chairman Olson and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 2701, creating a rural broadband task on behalf of the Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB). KFB is the state's largest general farm organization representing more than 30,000 farm and ranch families through our 105 county Farm Bureau Associations.

Kansas Farm Bureau has clear policy on rural communications:

“We support every home and business in Kansas having access to a high-speed communication infrastructure at a reasonable cost. We support a vibrant high-speed broadband network that delivers telemedicine applications, distance learning applications for K-12, higher education and continuing education, and gives libraries the ability to provide interactive content for rural citizens.”

High speed internet has become a critical piece to a growing and thriving rural Kansas community. Farmers and ranchers depend on a safe and reliable surface infrastructure to get our products to market. Every passing day our members are in need of solid communications infrastructure to conduct business transactions and communicate with suppliers, mechanics, fire responders and health care professionals. The speed and bandwidth of these telecommunications connections play a vital part in the efficiency of growing, raising and adding value to our state's food, fuel and fiber production.

Sophisticated broadband services and technologies do not merely serve one audience. Although many farmers and ranchers conduct their business operations from their homes, tractor cabs or feed trucks, access to broadband plays a role in a rural area's access to health care, government services, and educational and business opportunities. We risk current and future generations of rural Kansas being left behind if they are without affordable and reliable high-speed broadband service. As rural communities work to increase economic prosperity, attract new businesses, enrich student learning and extend the reach of health care, the state must do its part to assist and recognize the necessity of quality internet access. How can rural Kansas be successful in a global economy without the right tools? When rural communities thrive, Kansas thrives.

It is our belief that HB 2701 has the potential to help with meeting the policy goal outlined above. While a lot of the “heavy lifting” needs to occur at the federal level, it is appropriate for the state to evaluate actions that can be taken at the state level to encourage the expansion of rural broadband.

We appreciate the legislature's work on this complicated issue and stand ready to assist. In conclusion, we reiterate our support for HB 2701.