



Senate Ways and Means Committee

Mary Jane Stankiewicz

Proponent for SB 375

February 18, 2020

The Kansas Rural Independent Telecommunication Coalition (KRITC) and the State Independent Telephone Association (SITA) submit this written testimony in support of SB 375, also known as the FORWARD bill.

The rural telecommunication companies that KRITC and SITA represent provide telecommunication service to approximately 50% of the land mass in Kansas. Therefore, these companies and the people and businesses they serve utilize a significant number of roads and highways. It is critical that these roads are safe and well maintained.

We also support the establishment of a broadband grant program. We agree with KDOT Secretary Lorenz that Kansas needs to support the infrastructure of the state and that broadband is a necessary part of the infrastructure in Kansas.

By establishing a broadband program, Kansas will be eligible to pull down federal funding that is not available to states without a program. This bill puts \$5m into the broadband grant program. Some have questioned if this amount is adequate. While funding will always be important, we encourage you to not focus on the amount it will take to solve all the issues immediately but instead focus on starting the program immediately. Iowa illustrates what can be done with a smaller investment. Iowa implemented a broadband program and spent \$5m in 2019, which funded 17 rural broadband projects. Iowa is not unusual for the beginning of a program, most of the broadband programs in other states started with smaller funding and have grown as the programs have proven to be beneficial to the economic and social welfare of the state.

SB 375 is an important step to address the infrastructure needs across Kansas. Because of these reasons, KRITC and SITA asks you to pass out SB 375 out favorably.