

February 14, 2012

To: Senate Utilities Committee

Senator Pat Apple, Chair; Senator Mike Petersen, Vice Chair; Senator Kelly Kultala, Ranking Minority Member; Senator Terry Bruce, Member; Senator Jay Emler, Member; Senator Marci Francisco, Member; Senator Garrett Love, Member; Senator Ty Masterson, Member; Senator Ray Merrick, Member; Senator Dennis Pyle, member; Senator Mark Taddiken, member.

From: Carol Barta, Kansas Library Association Kan-Ed Liaison

Re: SB398

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 398. Access to Broadband Internet Service is as important today to rural Kansas communities as access to electricity was to those same communities a hundred years ago. It impacts how the people in those communities live, work and educate their children. It enables rural communities to make progress, develop economically and provide a quality of life that enables people to stay in the places they love.

Just as with the early implementation of electrical service, Broadband Internet has developed in a rather piecemeal fashion. Urban areas are awash in choices of Internet providers. There is a great deal of infrastructure in the cities, for the most part service is, available from several vendors, not expensive, and reliable. In rural communities it is another story.

I work for the North Central Kansas Libraries System, a 12-county region running from Washington and Marshall counties in the north to Chase and Marion counties in the south. Let me tell you a bit about two libraries in Marion County.

Peabody Township Library, in fact much of the town of Peabody, had very limited Internet access before joining Kan-Ed and getting one of the T-1 lines installed. They have 5 computers in the library, but frequently adult distance education students bring their own laptops to the library to work. Unfortunately, soon the t-1 line was maxed out from those few computers. Peabody has been looking for another connection to supplement the T-1 line, but there have been few Internet Service Providers in Marion County. Recently they received bids from two ISP's out of Newton for a 5 mbp Internet line. One was for \$300 per month and the other for \$500. Even with E-rate they will be paying at least \$1500 of their \$14,500 annual budget.

Hillsboro Public Library, not too far from Peabody, has a T-1 and a commercial connection. Good thing, because the commercial connection is unreliable. Not only the library, but also businesses in town report being unable to go online to conduct business, upload files or access information. Apparently it has become such a sore spot that several business have banded together to find a new provider for the community. The Kan-Ed T-

I has enabled the library to stay open for business for the people in the community. One of the telecom company employees told some of us that it will be very expensive to bring Hillsboro the kind of service it needs.

An issue that librarians in south western Kansas have mentioned is that even though their providers advertise an adequate amount of bandwidth, what they actually are able to deliver is much less. Many of these libraries have computer catalogs for locating and checking out books. The service is on a remote server located in California. Before the Kan-Ed T-1 lines were installed they had trouble checking out their books when the library computers were busy. The T-1 lines have given them stable, adequate bandwidth for transacting business.

Kan-Ed has offered libraries and their communities service beyond just the T-1 line. Their Internet service is stable and there is help on the other end of the line if something isn't working. As a matter of fact, they monitor the circuits and call us if they see that a router is down. Think of how important that is to the Kansan filing her taxes or applying for his new job.

As a librarian I am very aware of the need to work with budgets. Librarians are master penny pinchers. We understand the desire the Legislature has for Kan-Ed to be run in the most cost effective manner; however that does not preclude the need for quality service.

SB 398 could be a path to good, cost-effective Internet Service for Kansas libraries. An assessment tool to help libraries, and the other constituents figure out the actual Broadband needs and how to track those needs into the future is a good starting point. The amount of bandwidth required today is a small fraction of what will be needed in just a few years. SB 386 must be written for the future. Kan-Ed could also assist libraries in finding the providers who can and will make certain they receive the amount of bandwidth for which they are being charged – at least most of the time. And we need some sort of recourse when the providers fail to meet those targets.

We also will we need help paying for Internet. Let us lay to rest this notion that broadband internet service sufficient for half a dozen computers or more is ubiquitously available for \$70 a month. My home connection that might be able to handle two computers at once costs \$40, so libraries will need something beyond e-rate to help them serve their patrons. Rural library budgets are small, many less than \$10,000 annually, but they are exactly the communities where the only access in town to the Internet is the library.

Remember these library patrons are your patrons too. They frequently use the library computers to access the e-government solutions that are saving the State of Kansas money in other ways. SB398 could be an avenue to strengthening rural communities by giving them one more tool, like electricity, to make rural life livable.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration of this testimony.