



**Written Testimony of Consolidated Telephone Company in Support of House File 686
February 24, 2021**

Good afternoon Chair Stephenson and members of the Committee. My name is Joe Buttweiler the Director of Business Development at Consolidated Telephone Company (CTC) headquartered in Brainerd, MN.

Cooperatives are innovators. We innovate because we hold nothing more important to our company than the value we bring to our member-owners. Where I work at CTC, a broadband cooperative, our members began receiving telephone service in the 1950's. In the 1990's we innovated and provided DSL internet over copper infrastructure. For well over a decade now our members have had access to a Gigabit (1,000Mbps) broadband service over a fiber to the premise broadband network we constructed in the 2000's. What innovation is next at CTC? Within our laboratory in Brainerd, MN we are testing 10Gig (10,000Mbps) consumer broadband. Yes, we are deploying 10,000Mbps of broadband connectivity in 2021 when many in Minnesota have no access at all or incredibly slow 25Mbps service.

At CTC we innovate to help other cooperatives too, including our electric cooperative partners. We directly support multiple electric cooperatives in Minnesota and we have consulted with electric cooperatives who have launched broadband service in numerous other States across our country. Electric cooperatives we partner with to deploy broadband do so for a sole purpose – maximize the value for their member-owners. Unfortunately for electric cooperative's in Minnesota the cost of deployment is greater than what it needs be due to the inability to use existing easements. Cooperative easement restrictions have delayed, slowed and stopped broadband expansion in Minnesota.

As you know, most electric cooperatives began obtaining easement rights from property owners often times in the 1930's at a time when a light bulb in a barn seemed as far-fetched as a 10,000Mbps fiber optic broadband connection may seem to the owner of a small manufacturing business in Merrifield, MN. When we speak about the lack of broadband connectivity we also talk about the barriers to success. What barriers can we break down when the cost of deployment is the single biggest challenge? This easement bill is one of those barriers we can break down. Let's reduce the cost of deployment for our electric cooperatives whose owners are the citizens and businesses all across Minnesota. Once upon a time we needed electricity to plug in a light bulb in our barn. Today we need broadband connectivity to run a competitive farm. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to speak with you today.