February 24, 2021

Dear Chair Westrom and Committee Members,

On behalf of our more than 90 members, the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition writes in support of SF 22 and SF 946. These bills would appropriate an additional $120 million to the Border-to-Border Broadband Grant Program over the next two years and help ensure we meet our state speed goals. SF 946 has an additional $30 million to target the hardest-to-reach areas of our state that badly need investments in broadband infrastructure. These bills would make a historic investment in our state grant program.

The Coalition cannot yet fully support SF 1186. Although it would bring a much needed $50 million to the grant program in the upcoming biennium, the Coalition is concerned with the policy changes included in the bill, particularly the restriction of state investments (lines 2.7-2.8) in areas that may receive federal grants. This language does not specify that federal investments must meet the same high standards and level of service, including statutory broadband speed goals of 100mbps download and 20mbps upload, required of applicants to the Minnesota broadband grant program.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that we need broadband now more than ever. This is especially true in our rural communities, many of which have been unserved or underserved for many years. Broadband is the critical infrastructure that allows us to work, learn, receive care, and communicate with friends and family.

Thank you for dedicating your time and resources to hearing these bills and emphasizing the importance of broadband in Minnesota.

Respectfully yours,

Vince Robinson
Chair
Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition