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May 10, 2022

TO: Chair Sundin and Representative Hausman; Howard; Vang; Theis
Chair Westrom and Senators Draheim; Dornink; Pratt; Dzedzic

From: Cathy McLeer, AARP State Director

Re: HF 4366/SF 4019; Omnibus Agriculture, Housing and Broadband Bill

Dear Chairs and Conference Committee Members:

On behalf of our 640,000 members and all 50-plus Minnesotans, AARP Minnesota thanks you for your attention to expanding access to affordable, reliable high-speed internet service, also known as broadband.

There is no longer any doubt about the critical importance of broadband access. The pandemic has exposed how older Minnesotans without access to affordable high-speed internet are at a disadvantage in combatting isolation, scheduling vaccine appointments, accessing telehealth services, and much more. We respectfully submit the following comments on the Broadband articles in HF 4366.

AARP supports the new investments in the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program in Article 2 of the House bill. The additional \$25 million investment in the Border-to-Border grants and changes that both increase the grant amounts to \$10,000,000 and the matching award to 75% will go a long way in encouraging broadband deployment in hard-to-serve areas of the state, including many rural areas.

While these funds are a critically important step in closing these gaps, AARP Minnesota also encourages new federal infrastructure funds to be used to support broadband deployment; enhance and strengthen mapping efforts to support better decision-making; reduce the cost for consumers (particularly low-income older consumers) to access internet service; and strengthen efforts to build the digital navigation skills of Minnesotans that have previously been left behind.

Additionally, while the new line extension in Senate Article 7 sounds intriguing and creates a process for households and businesses to identify gaps in service, AARP is concerned that the new method creates administrative expense (both for the



department and providers) and duplicative costs for taxpayers when broadband deployment is done on an ad hoc basis.

We believe it would be far more efficient to use this information to refine the existing broadband grant program (Border-to-Border) than to create a separate program to fund line extensions to the random, miscellaneous locations identified through the reporting process.

Again, thank you for your work on this important legislation. AARP Minnesota is committed to working with lawmakers to make these critical improvements and help make the state a more age-friendly place for all Minnesotans. If you have questions or wish to discuss this matter further, please contact me at cmcleer@aarp.org or AARP Advocacy's Director, Mary Jo George, at mgeorge@aarp.org or 651 271-6586.

Cc: Governor Walz
Senate Majority Leader, Jeremy Miller
House Speaker, Melissa Hortman

