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April 3, 2024

The Honorable Ginny Klevorn
Chair
State and Local Government Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
381 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Klevorn:

On behalf of Gigapower, a joint venture between AT&T and BlackRock, I am writing to express concerns about HF 4182, the Equal Access to Broadband Act.

As a wholesale broadband transport service provider, Gigapower is committed to enhancing broadband access in Minnesota. Gigapower recently announced expansion its state-of-the-art fiber network to Bloomington, Eden Prairie, Eagan, Savage, Apple Valley, Burnsville, Farmington, Lakeville, Rosemount and Shakopee. We appreciate the Legislature's efforts to ensure that every resident has access to high-quality internet services. Our mission aligns with your objectives: to deliver faster internet speeds and foster a more competitive market for internet providers, ensuring that the benefits of digital connectivity reach every corner of the state.

While we agree with your objectives to bring broadband internet technology to underserved and unserved areas, there are critical aspects of the bill that merit reevaluation due to their potential to impede the progress we aim to achieve together. The mandate for municipal franchise agreements introduces delay into the process. Fees for the utilization of public rights-of-way potentially create a substantial financial consideration to building in the state.

Moreover, the bill presents a complex regulatory landscape that could hinder our deployment of broadband infrastructure efficiently. The prospect of varying requirements across multiple local jurisdictions adds a burdensome layer of administration, increases

project timelines, and inflates costs, which could decelerate the expansion of broadband services. The approach to coordinating with local governments, as proposed, may result in disparate standards and expectations, leading to significant challenges in planning and implementing broadband deployment projects consistently. A more effective way is to consider a state-wide structure and fee, thereby avoiding a patchwork of varying municipal approaches.

When Gigapower invests in a market, many factors are taken into consideration. Minnesota is known for its innovative business climate and streamlined regulatory and governmental processes. We would be remiss not to mention the impact Gigapower has on the local economy, not only through direct capital investment but also by supporting the community with a robust ecosystem of contractors, workforce consultants, and ancillary businesses. This multifaceted contribution to the workforce enhances local economies and supports Minnesota's standing as a hub of progress. It is our hope that through collaborative discussion, we can align on the nuances of the bill to ensure it fosters an environment conducive to the growth and sustainability of broadband access across Minnesota.

In light of these concerns, we respectfully urge the Legislature to consider modifications to HF 4182 that address these issues. We are committed to working with the Legislature, local governments, and other stakeholders to ensure that all of Minnesota has access to fast, reliable, and competitive broadband services.

Sincerely,

Toni Broberg
Vice President External Affairs
Gigapower, LLC

cc: The Honorable Jim Nash, State and Local Government Finance and Policy Committee