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# JAMES W. EDMING

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 87<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## **Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 239**

*Assembly Committee on Rural Development*

April 6, 2021

Madam Chair and committee members, thank you for holding this public hearing today for Assembly Bill (AB) 239. This important legislation will invest \$500 million of the funds our state will be receiving from the federal government as a part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in broadband expansion.

Throughout my time representing the people of the 87th Assembly District, one of the most common concerns that I hear about from the people I represent is the need for improved high-speed broadband access. Large parts of my district, like many parts of rural Wisconsin, do not have access to reliable high-speed internet and this hurts economic growth, limits educational opportunities, and diminishes the quality of life. This need became even clearer over the last year as many Wisconsinites were forced to work or learn from home. When schools closed last spring, I heard from a number of parents that their children were struggling with remote learning due to the lack of reliable internet access.

Over the past several budgets we have invested in increased funding for broadband expansion. However, even with that increased funding, when each round of broadband grants are announced, there are always a number of projects that go unfunded. I am sure that a number of my colleagues have heard from disappointed constituents like I have when proposed broadband projects are not funded in their area. In fact, one county I represent, Taylor, has gotten so tired of the lack of broadband access in their area that the county bonded to start laying some fiber themselves. The county applied for a broadband expansion grant in the most recent round of funding to build on this county investment, but unfortunately, their grant application was not approved.

The one-time influx of federal dollars our state will be receiving through ARPA provides us a unique opportunity to address a critical need in many parts of our state. By investing \$500 million into our state's broadband expansion grant program we will be going a long way to closing the broadband gap that exists in our state.

Madam Chair and committee members, I ask for your support of AB 239 and thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.



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# ROB SUMMERFIELD

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 67<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

April 6, 2021

Representative VanderMeer, Chair  
Representative Moses, Vice-Chair  
Members of the Assembly Committee on Rural Development

**Testimony on 2021 Assembly Bill 239**

*Relating to: the use of certain federal funds for broadband expansion grants*

Dear Chairwoman VanderMeer, Vice-Chair Moses, and Committee Members:

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify at today's public hearing on Assembly Bill 239. I appreciate your time and consideration of this legislation.

Wisconsin needs an ambitious, bold plan to ensure our state can remain competitive in the coming decades. According to the FCC, nearly 400,000 Wisconsinites lack access to basic high-speed internet services, with roughly 20% of rural residents falling into this category. This disparity comes at a time when neighboring Midwestern states, like Illinois, Minnesota and Michigan, have rolled out aggressive proposals to connect their states and bolster their economies.

Furthermore, in the most recent round of Broadband Expansion Grant awards, only 58 of the 124 applications were approved. Sixty six projects were rejected, leaving approximately 4,500 businesses and 95,000 households without access.

Governor Tony Evers declared 2021 the "Year of Broadband". Assembly Bill 239 will ensure he follows through on this promise. It allocates \$500 million from the American Rescue Plan Act funds to the Broadband Expansion Grant Program, with \$125 million being awarded each year through 2024. It also requires the PSC to submit an annual report to the Joint Committee on Finance concerning the evaluation of applications and the disbursements of said funds to grant recipients.

This is a crucial investment needed at this crucial time. Please join me in supporting this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob Summerfield". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

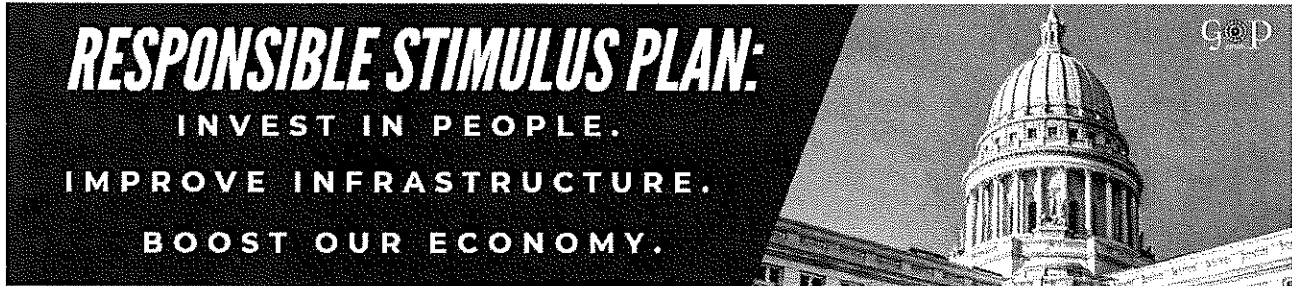
**State Representative Rob Summerfield**  
67<sup>th</sup> Assembly District



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# HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT



April 6, 2021

**Assembly Committee on Rural Development  
Testimony on Assembly Bills 235 and 239**

Thank you Chair VanderMeer and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify in favor of Assembly Bills (AB) 235 and 239. These bills are part of our Responsible Stimulus Plan and I appreciate the opportunity to support our efforts on behalf of the people of Wisconsin.

**The Responsible Stimulus Plan reflects the legislature's priorities to invest in people, improve infrastructure and boost our economy as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a thoughtful, thorough plan to work with the Governor to dedicate massive Federal investments from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) into the things that matter most to the people we serve.**

Both houses of the legislature have spent considerable time and effort to develop a real plan after listening and understanding the needs of our people, communities and industries. This plan provides relief and investment to all communities, of all sizes, statewide. Our plan puts money back into the hands of the people.

AB 235 directs the Governor to allocate \$50 million to the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to provide grants to rural counties. It also allocates \$50 million to make grants directly to farmers through a program similar to the Wisconsin Farm Support program, which was used to distribute Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding last year.

AB 239 directs the Governor to dedicate \$500 million of ARPA funds for broadband expansion through the Rural Broadband Expansion Grant program. This program has successfully expanded broadband into unserved and underserved areas of our state since 2014. It is important that we continue using the grant program, which is working well, to expand. This bill also directs the grant program to spend \$125 million per year from 2021-2024 in order to allow stakeholders time to develop meaningful projects for maximum expansion to unserved communities.

Again, please accept this testimony in support of legislation that will support the people of our state who are working to recover and move forward after the last unprecedented year in our history. I believe these bills will make a real difference. I apologize that I was not able to attend in person due to a meeting of the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC). However, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of these bills.