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Rabbi Moti Rieber, Executive Director
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Written Testimony by Rabbi Moti Rieber in Opposition to SB446, Restrictions on land ownership by foreign nationals.

Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs, Sen. Mike Thompson, chair

February 7, 2024

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I am executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” by educating, engaging and advocating on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical racial, economic and climate justice issues. I submit testimony in opposition to SB 466.

The first point that needs to be made is that the denominations and communities and individuals of faith that make up KIFA have an overwhelmingly positive view of the role of immigrants in our state and country. Many of us come from immigrant backgrounds, descendants of people who came to this country to seek a better life – some more recently, some less, but immigrants nonetheless.

We also have a positive view of the contributions of contemporary immigrants to our country. Whether it’s the person who works in the fields or in the meatpacking plants; or the person who cares for our parents or children; or the doctor who treats us; or the professor who teaches our children, immigrants have an overwhelmingly positive impact on our society. KIFA has long advocated for comprehensive immigration reform to normalize the status of the millions of undocumented immigrants in our country, and in the past we have advocated in this legislature for, for example, in-state tuition for immigrant children, regardless of their legal status.

We take our position on this directly from the teachings of our faith traditions, which teach us, “Care for the stranger, for you too were strangers,” or as Paul said, “Welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed you, to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7). Faith communities have been “at the forefront of accompanying migrant children and families in the US and abroad, resettling refugees, advocating on behalf of detained asylum seekers, offering pastoral and legal counsel to persons without legal status, aiding persons with the citizenship process, and helping newcomers learn to live in a new country.”¹

The United States does have foreign adversaries and restricting their ability to accumulate land might be appropriate. But a bill to address this would have to be narrowly structured to avoid preventing hardworking and responsible immigrants from the chance to attain that part of the American dream that land ownership represents. But this is not that bill. This bill treats every immigrant as a potential adversary. It puts an unelected and politically motivated council, led by an Attorney General with a long history of anti-immigrant animus, in place of the property rights and personal liberties of Kansans from immigrant backgrounds.

It's hard to imagine a greater intrusion into the personal liberties and freedoms of immigrant Kansans than putting an unelected panel led by Kris Kobach in charge of their property rights, for no other reason than that they are immigrants. This bill does not treat immigrant Kansans with the respect and concern they deserve. It should be voted down by this committee.

Thank you for your attention.

¹ ELCA Church, A Social Statement on Immigration (1998),
<https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ImmigrationSM.pdf>