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**To: The Honorable Ken Rahjes, Chair**  
and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

**From: Joslyn M. Kusiak**  
Private Practicing Attorney

**Re: Written Testimony in Support of HB 2174**  
Enacting the attorney training program for rural Kansas act to provide financial assistance to lawyers and law students who practice law in rural areas.

**Date: February 12, 2025**

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Chairman Rahjes and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to support HB 2174. I am writing to you as a business owner, a rural by choice citizen of rural Kansas, and as a private practicing attorney who serves the people of rural Kansas—people who rely on legal services to protect their livelihoods, businesses, and families. I witness firsthand the severe consequences of an attorney shortage in rural communities.

I have been an attorney for 12 years, with nine of those years dedicated to serving the people of rural Kansas. I am passionate about my community and strongly believe that individuals and businesses are entitled to quality legal services, wherever they may live or work. Unfortunately, access to lawyers in rural Kansas has become increasingly limited.

My clients include:

- **Agricultural families** with complex legal needs that include proactive planning, such as business planning, estate planning, and succession planning, and reactive legal issues that arise in times of stress, including property disputes and complex estate conflicts after a loved one becomes incapacitated or passes.
- **Small businesses owners** who benefit from proper legal frameworks for forming, maintaining, or selling their businesses, as well as advice and draft contracts to proactively avoid or reduce litigation.

- **Community members** who utilize estate planning to critically think through and define their intentions for if they become incapacitated or when they pass away, minimizing uncertainty and costly, emotionally charged family disputes.

While I am proud to serve clients in my community, I am the only attorney in my office, and have a number of existing clients whom I already serve. As a result, for months at a time I am often unable to accept new clients. This is a common complaint from individuals and business owners in my community, who say that they struggle to get even a return call from local law offices. For people seeking legal representation, this isn't an inconvenience—it's a crisis. Those who are unable to find a lawyer often go without essential advice or representation, leading to avoidable mistakes and legal issues that grow more complicated, expensive, and damaging over time.

When communities are underserved, local legal matters are left unresolved, resulting in serious financial and emotional consequences that extend beyond the individuals involved. This not only creates personal, family, and business hardships, but also leads to larger economic instability within and beyond the local community.

A strong, functioning judicial system is the foundation of a robust economy. When individuals and businesses have access to reliable legal counsel, they are better equipped to navigate transactions, resolve disputes, and prevent issues before they become costly problems. But when individuals and businesses cannot access timely legal counsel, they miss opportunities to prevent costly disputes, protect contracts, and make strategic decisions.

Spread over a number of years, the impact of limited legal help can be devastating to a small community like mine. For many, having access to an attorney can be the difference between securing a family legacy or losing generations of hard work and investment. At its core, the lack of attorneys in rural areas fosters conflicts and leads to economic instability and uncertainty.

HB 2174 is a critical step in reversing this damage. Without intervention, rural Kansas will continue to lose attorneys who provide essential legal services to its citizens. The incentives outlined in this bill not only help recruit new attorneys to rural areas, they also allow those of us already practicing here to expand the services we currently offer. The legal needs of my community could easily sustain three additional attorneys in my office alone. This bill would increase my chances of hiring attorneys to fill those positions and more fully serve my community.

I ask that this Committee recognize the threat that we now face. HB 2174 is an investment in the future of rural Kansas. If passed, it will help rural communities like mine with legal representation needed to thrive.

I respectfully request that this Committee advance HB 2174 to the full House.

Sincerely,



Joslyn M. Kusiak