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

From: Sarah Bootes Shattuck

Re: Written Testimony in Support of HB 2174

Date: February 13, 2025

Chairman Rahjes and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to submit my comments in support of HB 2174.

I was born and reared in Ashland and began my law practice here in 1982 upon the death of my father Willis A. Shattuck, who practiced here from 1947 until his death. My grandfather Willis H. Shattuck, although not a lawyer, served as the County Judge for many years. I also have an office in Greensburg (Kiowa County). I have deep roots in Southwest Kansas and it is my great hope that this area continues to thrive. A critical part of assuring our rural life remains vibrant is the presence of lawyers who live and work in their communities.

The Rural Justice Task Force has documented the critical shortage of lawyers in rural areas and the fact this shortage will only become more dire as lawyers my age retire. Lawyers not only provide services directly to their clients, but also provide many indirect benefits to rural communities, serving on local boards, giving advice pro bono to friends and neighbors who drop in to the office, taking appointments in criminal and child welfare cases at far less than they could earn from private clients.

Lawyers willingness and enthusiasm to handle these matters in addition to their regular private practices contribute great value: boards who look to their attorney member to quietly steer them away from legal issues, the elderly person who can't afford legal services, the local court system that otherwise would have to pay lawyers to drive hundreds of miles to provide representation. All these services, which enhance the life of the community are not, and probably

cannot, be quantified. They are nevertheless essential to maintaining strong, thriving rural communities.

If we lose lawyers in rural communities who will suffer? The poor and elderly whose needs will go unmet, the middle class who will have to pay more to go to larger communities to find those services, probably taking their dollars with them as they shop in larger towns, and the community at large which will pay more to import services.

I intend to continue practicing as long as I am physically able. I love practicing law, but I am very aware that the time will come when I will have to quit. I hope and, frankly, pray that there will be an attorney to join my practice and to continue serving this area. This problem is not unique to lawyers, and HB 2174 is only beginning to address the issue, but it is an important first step. Please support this legislation.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Very truly yours,

Sarah Bootes Shattuck