

To: Senate Committee on Ways and Means
From: John Goodyear, General Counsel
Date: February 12, 2025
RE: Testimony in Support of SB 214 – Written Only

I want to thank Chairman Billinger and the members of the Committee for affording the League of Kansas Municipalities the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of SB 214.

I want to start by commending the work of the Rural Justice Initiative Committee. Their work and the product of their study has identified and framed an issue that most in the legal community have been aware of for some time – there is an attorney shortage in most of our state and it has reached crisis levels. The dearth of legal representation in many areas limits access to the legal system and to justice itself. Steps need to be taken to address the crisis. The Committee, their recommendations, and this bill are big steps in the right direction.

The financial and training assistance provided by this Act are targeted answers to the broad problem and are direct result of the study – this is what practicing attorneys in rural areas and law students told the Committee was needed. These programs are well positioned to help address the problem, but they will take time and commitment by all involved. Action is needed today and it is likely that more action will be needed to fully address the issue – we don't know everything that will be needed, but we do know that we must start. To quote President Roosevelt; "it is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something." With this legislation we are trying something, and it is a tremendous first step.

The League is grateful for the opportunity to weigh in on SB 214 and support this first step toward addressing a real problem. We would ask that this Committee report the bill favorably to the full House.