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Wheat State Wine Co., LLC

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Chairman and members of the committee:

My name is Laura Tyler and I am the co-owner and winemaker at Wheat State Wine Co. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB379, and the repeal of the 60/40 rule.

My husband, Chris Tyler, and I established our vineyard in Winfield, Cowley County, in the spring of 2009. We planted 2000 vines over three acres. During the winter of 2010 through the spring and summer of 2011 we renovated a barn into a winery, purchased equipment and established our farm winery with the intent of harvesting and fermenting our own grapes in the fall of 2011. With the investment of our time and capital, the summer of 2011 left us with next to nothing worthy of harvest. Fortunately for us, Smoky Hill Vineyard and Winery cancelled some of their contracts and we were able to pick up a projected 5 to 8 tons of grapes, which turned out to be 800 lbs. of fruit, due to drought. Within the confines of the 60/40 rule we were also able to buy grapes from Missouri. Our opening date is May 2012 and we are at risk of running out of wine before the year is over, which would obviously be bad for our first year of business.

Unforeseeable crop yield is one reason that I support SB379. In a bad year, it is unfortunate for the vineyards to lose a crop. Wineries will still need a viable option for fruit if Kansas weather gives us an unfavorable growing season.

Another reason for my support is that there simply are not enough grapes available in the state, to provide farm wineries with the amount needed to sustain a profitable business. Wineries need to make a certain amount of wine to be sustainable, and we cannot let that amount of wine be dictated by the amount of grapes grown in the state. When we got into this business, we understood that the nature of the industry was to provide a tremendous amount of capital upfront, if SB379 is accepted, we would be able to reclaim our investment sooner rather than later.

I understand that some of the vineyard owners might be frightened that SB379 will allow for the wineries to source grapes from other states and not buy in state. I counter that argument with my own experience and knowledge as a winemaker. I will not go as far as speaking for the other winemakers in the state, but as one myself, I prefer to source grapes locally. There are many benefits for doing so. The quality is the biggest reason for me. The quality of grapes goes down when the time from the vine to the winery is increased. It is beneficial to source locally. Also, prices are reduced for the winery because shipping costs are lower, so they can afford to pay more for local grapes. When a customer goes to a Kansas farm winery, they expect, in addition to seeing a vineyard on a farm, at least some wine that is made from Kansas grapes, and we want to offer that. The last reason I have for buying local product is terroir. This is a French name for the regional character the soil and geographical makeup give to grapes. The reason that we built Wheat State Wine Co. is to showcase Kansas. Grapes grown in this state have unique characteristics. A grape produced here will not yield the same taste as the same variety grown anywhere else in the world. That is the reason we named our company, Wheat State Wine Co. and that is the reason we will always want to use Kansas grapes. That being said, a winery should have other options to source grapes, and not be restricted by the amount that we receive in state.

In closing I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony to you in support of SB379 and pass the bill favorable out of committee. Please feel free to contact me at 620-262-5697 or laura@wheatstatewineco.com at any time if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Laura Tyler

Sn Fed & State
Attachment 8

2-21-12