

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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ELLSWORTH COUNTY
ELLSWORTH, KANSAS 67439-3118

February 15, 2016

Testimony IN SUPPORT to HB 2648

Before the House Committee on Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development

Submitted By: Kermit Rush, Ellsworth County Commission Chairman

Chairman Hutton and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Ellsworth County and its residents, thank you for allowing me to address you today. My name is Kermit Rush. I am a lifelong resident of Ellsworth County and have served on as a County Commissioner over the past 15 years. As a County Commissioner, I understand the role you serve here in the State Legislature and the need to balance the needs and wants of the State of Kansas through the policies and state laws that create balance between all state agencies as well as the balance between urban and rural community initiatives.

Ellsworth County was fortunate during back in the 1980s when legislation was approved to construct the Ellsworth Correctional Facility. There was a need then to expand correctional facilities and Ellsworth County business leaders were supportive of the Kansas Legislature allowing the Department of Correction to expand its services here to North Central Kansas. In 2014, the Ellsworth Correctional Facility celebrated 25 years of service in our community, which has provided stability and steady growth. The Ellsworth Correctional Facility has attracted talented individuals with many skills that have been utilized through the various vocational programs and services offered to the inmates.

The House Bill 2648 that is being proposed amends K.S.A. 75-5275 and K.S.A. 75-5275a to allow Kansas Correctional Industries to build up to five modular residential homes per year at the Ellsworth Correctional Facility. This is a vocational program that provides inmates with viable trade skills and gives them experience to seek gainful employment upon reintegrating back into their respective communities from Southwest Kansas to the Kansas City Metropolitan area.

House Bill 2648 will produce several the following opportunities to create sustainability and grow for our local and regional economy:

- Public Private Partnership
- Increased local business for local contractors, plumbers, electricians, banks and insurance agents
- Vocational programs at the Correctional Facility

As an elected official, my colleagues and I have strived to develop strategies to address the housing shortage that have hindered other rural communities and have worked collectively to initiate an afford housing initiatives like the one Ellsworth County launched in 2003 with our "Free Land" program, which helped employees relocate to our community to avoid the long commutes. By initiating our Free Land program like we did in 2003, it helped with the

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benefitting from establishing a partnership the Department of Corrections that worked in the years past. As an Ellsworth County Commissioner, I would encourage you to support this proposed house bill and allow the strategies that we have been set here in North Central Regional to provide job and economic development opportunities that will grow the local and state's economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kermit Rush". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kermit Rush
Ellsworth County Commission Chairman