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House of Representatives

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Steven C. Johnson
Representative, 108th District

Thank you, Chairman Hutton, and members of the committee.

You have heard from leaders in Ellsworth about the importance of this program to their businesses and community. I underscore their request and ask your consideration of their business interests, the community needs, and the ability to serve our state by reducing our prison population.

You have heard that the community needs housing in a price range that meets the needs of entry-level workers. This issue is not unique to Ellsworth but this possible solution is.

You've heard the case for over a dozen businesses to partner with the program, from the initial sale of lumber, through the insurance purchased on the finished product. This business doesn't happen without the building program. Current demand for this price point of housing continues to exceed supply. The opportunity to further partner with community colleges may be good for the college and provide a way to license workers in some trades. With unemployment in the 3-4% range in many areas, this can be a plus within and beyond our community to prepare skilled workers.

Finally, you have heard the case for reducing those who return to the prison. This program gives the inmate workers employable job skills and pride in their work. It also gives us a hope for reducing the prison population and resulting cost. This is good for the inmates, the state, and our businesses.

While I recognize the importance of not having government compete with private industry, we see opportunities for business to be gained rather than lost.

For these and other reasons, I stand as a proponent of this bill with my neighbors in Ellsworth. In addition to positives for the corrections program, this is about Ellsworth business and economic development. We ask your consideration to be able to further build our businesses as well as our community and housing.

Steven Johnson

Representative, District 108