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To: Chairman Waymaster and Appropriations Committee Members
From: Stacy Davis, Sumner County Economic Development Executive Director
RE: Proponent Testimony for HB 2375

Thank you for your time today. I'm pleased to stand before you in favor of funding Rural Opportunity Zones. We do not want to lose the ROZ money in Sumner County as it's an important economic development tool for my rural area. My job as an economic development director is to recruit the talent needed for my communities to not simply sustain, but thrive. With limited incentives to entice young professionals to move to rural Kansas, I rely heavily on the Rural Opportunity Zone program.

It's no secret rural counties, such as Sumner County, have seen a decline in population, especially in the professional pathways. For example, Sumner County has two rural hospitals. Both hospitals have local physicians striving to make a difference and help keep the doors open. But they can't work forever. One hospital has a doctor that is nearing the age of retirement. He is the only doctor within that community and services the surrounding smaller townships. The other hospital offers different services, but the community it services has one family practice with six physicians, two of which are nearing retirement age.

Recently, I have been in discussions with doctors from another state that are considering relocating to Sumner County, Kansas. My bargaining tool is the ROZ and it is working. These young physicians have toured Sumner County, visited with local hospital administration and are weighing their options.

In 2016 the Sumner County Commissioners opted to participate in the student loan repayment portion of ROZ. This opportunity allowed the ten manufacturing companies located in Sumner County to strengthen their recruiting efforts for engineers and other professional talent. Student loan repayment is a tremendous resource for our local companies to offer as it makes their employment package more competitive with the offers coming from major metropolitan areas.

The healthcare and manufacturing industries are the backbone of our county's economy,



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but their success is not a guarantee. Much of it is impacted by their ability to recruit and retain a quality workforce. That's where ROZ has been helpful. We need that incentive to bring them here. From that point, it's our job to help them integrate into the community and establish long-term community ties. But without ROZ, our efforts are made increasingly harder.

As a rural economic development professional, I rely heavily on ROZ dollars. We need every tool in our toolbox and I implore you not to end the ROZ funding. I appreciate this body's recent support of the Ad Astra Rural Jobs Act and we hope that will make it through the legislative process.

But we can't lose the tools we have. I encourage you to keep ROZ funding in place so all of our rural counties have the option to use them as tools for growing and strengthening rural Kansas.

The Rural Opportunity Zone designation has been successful in assisting many rural Kansas counties increase the number of new citizens making these counties their home and reversing those counties' trends of losing population. It is important that Kansas continue to strive to maintain the viability of our small towns and counties through programs such as the ROZ program.

I respectfully submit this testimony for your consideration in keeping the Rural Opportunity Zone fully funded and voting for HB 2375.

Thank you for your time today. I'm happy to stand for questions.

Stacy L. Davis

Executive Director