

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 91

Chair Erickson and members of the Committee,

My name is Kevin Willmott, and I am a filmmaker and a Professor in the Film and Media Studies Department of the University of Kansas.

I was born and raised in Kansas, I grew up in Junction City, and went to college at Marymount College of Kansas in Salina. I attended graduate school at New York University, Tisch School of the Arts and returned home in 1991 to make my first feature film, *Ninth Street*. I have been here ever since.

I have been making films in Kansas since that time and in 2020 completed my seventh feature film, *The 24th*, which had a nine-million-dollar budget, but unfortunately, I was forced to move the production to North Carolina because Kansas lacks a motion picture tax credit and incentive.

In 2019, I wrote the film, *Blackkklansman* with Spike Lee and two others. It was nominated for 215 awards. I won the Academy Award for Best Adapted screenplay, I also won the British Academy Award, the Bafta. I wrote that screenplay in Lawrence, Kansas, not Hollywood, California.

Every day from my home in Lawrence, I zoom with production companies and major studios about projects they want me to write.

In years past, when I traveled to Los Angeles for a meeting with a studio, they always started with, "So where do you live New York or LA?" When I said Kansas there were always jokes and explanations. I no longer must do that because on zoom many of them are also no longer in Los Angeles. The film business has changed. Movies are shot in the place that has the best incentive because the film business, like any other business, is first motivated by profit.

My feature film, *The Only Good Indian* which we shot in 2009 was the last film to benefit from a Kansas tax credit. We shot the film in Cottonwood Falls and Wichita. It premiered at the Sundance film festival and starred Oscar winner, Wes Studi. Since then, we have missed countless productions because Kansas could not compete with other states that have incentives.

Movies that were set in Kansas, movies about Kansas history, movies that could benefit and improve the lives of Kansans have gone to neighboring states or further away to Georgia, New Mexico, and North Carolina. That was attention and prestige that was meant for Kansas it did not receive.

I have numerous former students who now successfully work in the film industry, who would love to return with projects, but are unable because we lack the tax credit. This hurts the lives of young Kansans that presently work in production and want to continue to live and work here at home.

I am currently making plans to shoot my next feature film that is set in my hometown. Unfortunately, the production will go elsewhere.

I also have plans to create a TV series that I would love to shoot in Kansas. But I will be unable to convince the producers to bring it to my beloved state because we are not in the game.

Young people keep a state alive, and art and culture keep things moving and vigorous. Motion picture production brings excitement to a city and a state. Look at Georgia, need I say more.

We have national college championship sports teams which is also entertainment. Movies and sports are all the same thing. We have everything we need to have a strong film industry right here. It is past time Kansas got in the game with motion pictures.

You can't win if you don't play.

Sincerely,

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