



Dear Senators,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony for bill HB2083. I have worked in the realm of economic and community development for the past fifteen years and volunteered for local development causes for a decade prior to that. I witness the damage that chronically vacant properties do to communities every day, and I admittedly oppose what amounts to legislative protection for slumlords.

Registering vacant properties is not an immediate or flippant process. Generally, there is a minimum time period a building must remain vacant prior to submission for a registry. In Emporia, that minimum time frame is eighteen months. Post registration, property owners can work with agencies to market properties for rental or sale, obtain additional development financing, or simply create a plan for the structure. Transitions of ownership, foreclosures, and construction delays are typically accounted for within the registration process.

The properties communities have targeted for registries have typically been vacant for multiple years (chronic vacancies in development speak). These types of vacancies are harmful to communities. Vacant residential properties are a magnet for crime, and once materials like copper are stolen from internal infrastructure can quickly become blighted. Fire Departments and other emergency services cannot readily determine the difference between an occupied and vacant property without a registry, and the lack of information can put lives at risk. Chronically vacant residential properties are often used as storage sheds, ignoring zoning regulations, while our communities throughout the state seek taxpayer funded initiatives to build more housing and support infrastructure. Some vacant housing was simply inherited by someone that lives in a different community or state, and while they may maintain the yard or some basic external cosmetic appearances, the structure will inevitably dilapidate. People avoid purchasing homes next to dilapidation because of the adverse effects on property values, often resulting in a growing cancer of dilapidation and vacancy that starts with one chronically vacant residential property.

Commercial chronic vacancies are more problematic. Donovan Rypkema, a national economist that studies the impacts of structures on economies, estimates that a typical chronically vacant downtown storefront in a midwestern community costs the economy \$54,000 per year in missed economic activity and tax revenue. Optimizing commercial space often requires buildings in close proximity, and dilapidation can (and often does) put neighboring properties and businesses at risk. As a person that has dealt with chronic vacancies impacting the livelihoods of neighboring businesses, it is an unnecessary

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burden on our Kansas economy. Entrepreneurs need good spaces next to other entrepreneurs to thrive, and a chronically vacant property can quickly promote blight while endangering the public with numerous potential health and safety concerns.

Chronic property vacancies are not victimless. They cost Kansas communities, our local economies, and our taxpayers. Please don't reward property owners who choose to keep properties vacant through legislative support with legislation that equates to a slumlord protection act. Kansans have rights, but we also have responsibilities. Legislation like HB2083 can quickly devolve into passively encouraging long term dilapidation, and that is not a position we should take as Kansans. Trust our communities to responsibly register residential and commercial vacancies. Let home rule mean something as we work with those willing to invest and focus on being good neighbors in the pursuit of a better Kansas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Casey Woods". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light grey background.

Casey Woods  
Executive Director, Emporia Main Street

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