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Supporting Testimony for HB2290

For the Senate Ways and Means Committee

March 9, 2023

Mason Ruder

Mayor, City of Hays, Kansas

Chair Billinger and members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee:

Please accept this letter as written testimony of my support for House Bill 2290. Fort Hays State University (FHSU), North Central Kansas Technical College (NCK Tech), and Northwest Kansas Technical College (Northwest Tech) have long been beacons of opportunity and drivers of economic prosperity in rural Kansas. Today and in the days ahead, our communities face significant demographic and economic challenges, including:

- A shrinking rural population.
- An aging workforce
- A decline in the number of college-bound students in rural Kansas

The economic impact of these demographic changes is nothing less than devastating to our rural Kansas economy.

The City of Hays is a growing regional hub of many different forms of industry, retail, and healthcare. Our institutions are of paramount importance to not only growing our region, but in sustaining it. Within each section of learning with these institutions, every sector of our local economy can benefit.

By allowing the three institutions to create this affiliation, western Kansas and beyond can know that we are looking to build upon the values that make Kansas a great place to live, work, and play. This is a unique opportunity to begin to establish an ever shrinking pipeline of workers of all skill sets while also allowing them to grow in their education beyond what may have been possible before.

The City of Hays stands behind the quality and ever growing value these institutions bring to not only Kansas but beyond even our borders. Presidents Mason, Burks, and Schears are accomplishing incredible feats to look beyond each campus and to the workforce beyond. With HB2290, Presidents Mason, Burks, and Schears have proposed an innovative institutional affiliation plan that I believe offers rural Kansans their best chance to fulfill their talents, skills, and interests in or near their home towns and expand our economic output.

The three institutions will build a powerful coalition of businesses, industries, and communities that will focus on creating new opportunities for students, expanding entrepreneurship, and meeting local workforce development needs. The three institutions are also committed to working closely together on the development of market-smart academic programs, integrated student services, and the leveraging of new efficiencies and optimizations that reduce unnecessary bureaucratic barriers to student success while promoting an ever expanding Kansas economy.

Please know that I stand with FHSU, NCK Tech, and Northwest Tech in support of HB2290. This affiliation will build stronger communities and keep our graduates local so they can contribute to the economic prosperity of our region. This affiliation is the right move at the right time for rural Kansas.

City of Hays, KS

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mason Ruder". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Mason Ruder
City of Hays, KS
Mayor
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