



HB2375 – An act making and concerning appropriations for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2019 and June 30, 2019 for the department of commerce.

Submitted to the House Appropriations Committee
by Christy Hopkins, Director of Greeley County Community Development
March 20, 2017

Greeley County Community Development strongly supports the appropriation of funds for the Rural Opportunity Zone program for fiscal years 2018 and 2019, and we encourage you to maintain funding of the program through 2022, as extended by the Senate Substitute for House Bill 2109 in 2015.

Since the program's creation in 2011, our community has experienced great success in utilizing the ROZ program and we are eager to see it continue. Currently, Unified Greeley County has 23 active ROZ student-loan repayment participants. Collectively, these 23 individuals have 12 children and the total number of individuals in their collective households is 44 people. They've bought homes in our community and they are employed, working in a variety of industries. Three have started new businesses. In a 2014 survey conducted by the Kansas Department of Commerce, 9 of the 10 Unified Greeley County participants who responded indicated that the program was a contributing factor in their decision to move to Greeley County and to remain living here. Following this testimony, you will find additional data about the individuals and their impact.

Unified Greeley County is currently experiencing population growth, and is one of only 2 rural Kansas counties to experience greater than 4% population growth from 2010-2015 – coming in at 5.7% growth and joining Geary County's 4.9%. From the opening day of school in 2013 to the opening day in 2014, Greeley County Schools increased its enrollment 25%. Since 2010, 29 units of housing have been built in Greeley County, compared to the 5 that were built from 2000 to 2010.

A number of factors influenced these increases – young families returning to the community resulting in larger classes entering pre-school and kindergarten than high school classes, additional jobs added by existing businesses and new developments, businesses establishing transition plans for the next generation of ownership, and more. The Rural Opportunity Zone program is an integral part of this success as it enhances our ability to recruit young, educated, productive residents to Greeley County.

Though our county's budget is limited, funding our portion of the Rural Opportunity Zone program is important to the Unified Greeley County Board of Supervisors. Our community, which has been focused on reversing declines and building a vibrant future for the past twelve years, sees the Rural Opportunity Zone program as an opportunity to incentivize skilled, educated individuals who fill a range of vital roles in our community, from providing vital healthcare services to transitioning businesses from the current generation to the next.

We strongly support the continuation of the Rural Opportunity Zone program and know that communities statewide that choose to participate in the program are seeing its benefits.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if I can be of assistance. I can be reached by phone at (620) 376-2548 or by email at clhopkins@fairpoint.net.

Rural Opportunity Zone Program Impact

For Unified Greeley County, March 2017

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Current ROZ participants

Collectively, these individuals:

- Purchased or built **9** homes (plus an additional 5 live in family homes)
- Have **12** children (4 enrolled in school and 8 that are pre-school age)
- Are fully employed (including one stay-at-home mom)
- Opened **3** businesses— a financial planning office, an audiology clinic, and a photography, videography, and sign shop
- Account for **44** additional people in the Greeley County community, when all members of their households are counted. Of those, all are under the age of 40.
- Are from Kansas and beyond—**5** participants relocated to Greeley County from other states



Unified Greeley County

County Seat: Tribune

Population: 1,330 (2015 estimate)

In Their Own Words

When surveyed in 2014, 10 of 20 participants responded, confirming that:

9 of 10 (90%) said ROZ was a contributing factor in their decision to move to Greeley County and remain living here.

4 of 10 (40%) said they had purchased or built a home in Greeley County.

2 of 10 (20%) said they had started or purchased a business in Greeley County.

"The Program has been very helpful and it has allowed me to start up a business because I could allocate other funds towards the business that may have been needed to help pay back student loans if it were not for the ROZ program."

"I have thoroughly enjoyed teaching in wonderful Tribune, KS and I have appreciated the support the county and state have given to recruit teachers (and other workers) to small rural communities. Thank you so much for the financial support."

"Great idea and a great incentive to get younger people back into smaller communities. I personally have had nothing but a very positive experience with the ROZ grant and the people whom have contacted me."

Unified Greeley County ROZ Participants by Industry

