



TO: Chairman Waymaster and Members of the House Appropriations Committee
FROM: Benjamin Anderson, Kearny County Hospital Chief Executive Officer
DATE: March 20, 2017
RE: House Bill 2375 – Support for Rural Opportunity Zone program

On behalf of Kearny County Hospital, I am pleased to provide a letter of support for House Bill 2375.

Kearny County Hospital (KCH) is a frontier health delivery complex in Lakin, 260 miles west of Wichita. KCH serves people from 20+ southwest Kansas counties, including immigrants from the most challenged places on earth.

In the past several years, we have successfully recruited over a dozen medical providers by allowing them paid time off that is often spent serving in some of the same countries from where our newest neighbors originate. These Millennial physicians cover each other's absences, travel overseas together, and collaborate to serve locally. They share a sense of compassion for vulnerable people and a commitment to social justice. They are choosing to move to our area because of the diversity and suffering that persists here.

Because of the new providers at KCH, we have gone from delivering under 100 babies in 2005 to current projections of delivering over 300 babies in CY 2017. We are currently serving over 15,000 patients from across our region and have been averaging nearly 200 new patients per month from up to 120 miles away for the past 18 months. We also offer skilled care for nearly 80 vulnerable residents.

To accommodate this growth, we have added 90 net-new FTE positions to our staff in the same 10-year period. In addition to physicians, these include mid-level (physician assistant/nurse practitioner) providers, medical technologists, nurses, accountants, and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists. The majority of these people are recipients of Rural Opportunity Zone benefits.

Healthcare expansion has resulted in broader economic growth in our county. In September of 2016, a new Cobblestone Inn and Suites opened adjacent to KCH. A new heating and air conditioning business and a local accounting firm have both opened in downtown Lakin in the last year. With the support of funds from the Pathways to a Healthy Kansas grant, a Hispanic investor is planning to open a new local restaurant in 2017, offering healthy options on its menu.

Of the 27 individuals who were attracted to live in Kearny County through the Rural Opportunity Zone program, 40% are affiliated with our healthcare delivery system. It is important, though, to note that the ROZ program is also a proven incentive for teachers, law enforcement officers, and business leaders. Most of these people come with families. Their children are enrolled in our local schools.

We know recruitment and retention are different. Although ROZ is successfully attracting young professional families to rural Kansas, the secret to retaining them is the warm, authentic hospitality that is displayed at the dinner tables of our local residents. People desire meaningful human relationships and some of the most humble, caring and authentic people live in the rural areas of our great state.

HB 2375 is extremely important for the long-term growth of the Kansas economy. If you will commit to continuing to fund this effort that supports bringing new families to our communities, we will commit to continuing to provide the hospitality that woos them to establish roots here. Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Sincerely,

Benjamin D. Anderson, M.B.A., M.H.C.D.S.
Chief Executive Officer
Kearny County Hospital

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"Providing quality, compassionate healthcare services for our community, to enrich the lives of our family, friends and neighbors."