

Testimony on SB 379 (Written)

Good morning Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Brett Schmidt and I am a Kindergarten teacher in Independence, Kansas. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB379.

I have been contemplating the possibility of starting a farm winery over the last 6 years. I have tried to locate grapes around the state and have had very little success. As a homemade winemaker (over the past few years) I have had to get juice from other states to make my small batches to practice the wine-making skills. The 60/40 piece of legislation has been a hindering factor for me though. I have been told that I would be able to petition the state to receive a waiver and purchase fruit and juice from other states in the beginning years of the winery. I do not feel secure depending on the possibility of receiving or not receiving a waiver on my investment. There is a limited supply of grapes in the state and as a beginning winery, growing my own grapes; it will take a minimum of 3 years to have any kind of crop to make wine. I need to start the commercial wine making in order to support the cost of the start-up vineyard.

I realize the argument that Kansas has been increasing the acreage over the last few years but we are far behind. Kansas had 350 acres of vines compared to Missouri with over 1500 acres of vines in 2011. I would love to have the opportunity to develop my own winery and grow my vineyard as the winery grows. My dream is to move back to our family farm and start planting vines and start a family winery. I know Kansas has the potential for a larger acreage of great vineyards and believe that this could be a real benefit to other small family farms. According to the Kansas Viticulture and Farm Winery Association website, Kansas had 5000 acres of grapes prior to prohibition and was one of the major factors in restoring the European grape industry in the 1800s because of our hearty, quality grapes. As it stands Kansas has around 22 wineries. If we are able to increase the number of wineries by lowering the percentage of Kansas grapes required we will only create more of a demand for hardy Kansas grapes. I believe that both sides of this debate will agree that we would like to grow the grape and wine industry in Kansas to, at least, the point we were before prohibition. This will not happen if we continue to severely limit the start-up of wineries that create such demand. Please support the SB379 to create a reduction of grapes grown in Kansas.

In closing I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony to you in support of SB379 and pass the bill favorable out of committee. Please feel free to contact me at bsebastian21@msn.com, 620-779-2460 at any time if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Brett Schmidt

Independence, Kansas