



DATE: March 6, 2018

FROM: Ottawa Area Chamber of Commerce – John C. Coen, President/CEO

TO: Kansas House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture

RE: **Testimony in support of SB 331** – An act concerning the department of wildlife, parks and tourism;

Thank you for allowing us this opportunity to provide **testimony on behalf of the Ottawa Area Chamber of Commerce, City of Ottawa and Franklin County Kansas in favor of Senate Bill 331.**

It's a very exciting time for recreational opportunities in Franklin County. Specifically, Ottawa is the only city where the Prairie Spirit Rail Trail State Park (PSRT), a 51-mile rail trail from Ottawa to Iola, and the Flint Hills Nature Trail (FHT) intersect. Already a part of the state parks system, the PSRT currently receives much more attention and maintenance. The FHT stretches for 117 miles across east-central Kansas, from Osawatomie in the east to Herington in the west, and passes through several communities, including three in Franklin County: Rantoul, Ottawa and Pomona. **Continued improvement of the FHT will encourage even more usage of the trails systems and increase the number those seeking to spend recreational dollars for an outdoor adventure.**

As construction and improvement continues on the FHT, there's an opportunity for Franklin County to emerge as a potential trailhead. Through grant funding, strategic planning and enhancement of key partnerships with organizations, Franklin County has an opportunity to become even more of a destination for local and regional cyclists, walkers and runners. Local businesses and organizations are beginning to see the vision of a becoming a bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly community. The City of Ottawa has completed bike lanes from the 100 to 500 block of Walnut Street to address the unmarked section of the PSRT. A new coffee shop recently opened in the 100 block of Main Street with hopes of targeting citizens of both of the PSRT and FHT. As the Flint Hills trail is developed further, Ottawa will have one of four signature bridges along the trail. The bridge's concept comes from the name of the river which flows through Franklin County: Marais des Cygnes or "Marsh of Swans."

We feel it is important in the development of a uniform trails systems to include the FHT as part of the State Parks system. It will allow for a more complete development of the trail and also encourage better signage and amenities to develop along the trail. All of this is important not only to the counties and communities along the trail, but also to the citizens using the trail for biking, hiking, walking and running.

**We view the trails through Franklin County and the Ottawa community to be a great economic and recreational benefit to our community.** We see Ottawa as a trailhead destination location as a big benefit to our community and of which we can take economic advantage. Franklin County, specifically Ottawa, is a location where citizens from the metropolitan areas (Johnson, Douglas and Wyandotte Counties) can travel, park their cars, and access the trails for a day of activities.

**We strongly support favorable committee action for SB 331** with a recommendation for passage to the full Kansas House of Representative. Thank you for your consideration of this request.