



February 18, 2019

Honorable Sen. Caryn Tyson
Chair, Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee
Kansas Capitol Building, Room 123-E
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Chairwoman Tyson and members of the Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee:

On behalf of the Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce and our 450 member businesses, representing over 10,000 employees throughout Southeast Kansas, please allow me to voice our overwhelming support for SB 135. This bill would add Crawford County, among other counties, to the list of Kansas rural opportunity zones (ROZ).

As the only county in southeast Kansas not currently included in the ROZ program, Crawford County is frequently at a competitive disadvantage when compared to surrounding counties. This is particularly true for Crawford County businesses as they attempt to recruit out-of-state employees in the face of a 3.5% unemployment rate. Including Crawford County in the ROZ program would equip these growing businesses with additional tools to help with workforce development/recruitment.

I would also offer that a strong Crawford County economy is important to the economic well-being of the region and the state. As Crawford County has emerged as a regional hub for commerce, education and health care, it's imperative that our business community remain in a position to serve those throughout southeast Kansas. The alternative is that southeast Kansas residents may choose to receive these services in Missouri and/or Oklahoma.

It's for these reasons (and several others) that I strongly urge you to consider the positive impact of SB 135. Of equal importance is SB 125, which would extend the ROZ program until 2027.

Thank you for your consideration, as we work together to fuel the Kansas economy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Blake Benson".

Blake Benson
President, Pittsburg Area Chamber of Commerce