

September 17, 2020

Special Committee on Economic Recovery
Kansas Capitol Rm 112
Video Testimony

Chairman Lynn and Distinguished Committee Members,

My name is George Hoff, and I am the owner of Stone Pillar Vineyard & Winery in Olathe, KS. We are the oldest family still living and farming on our original farm in the State of Kansas. Over the last 165+ years the dynamic of our farm has adapted to keep up with the times. I appreciate you allowing me the opportunity to address you regarding the effects COVID-19 has had on my business.

We have had to completely reorganize our business model. We had to let go of some key employees early on to maintain our fiscal obligations. Those positions were very much a part of our day to day operations. We are a small business and those in employ are like family. To our dismay, those let go have struggled to obtain their unemployment benefits or find other jobs.

We have not been able to offer our patrons with a traditional wine tasting experience as we had over the last 10 years. There are little to no guidelines for us operating and even less assistance. We are to do as we're told but offered no real solutions or relief by those leaders telling us how to operate.

Bottle sales are down, and our only saving grace was to offer massive discounts which cut deep into our bottom line. We are fortunate that we have been able to offer guests a place to go and enjoy our products because we have created an outdoor venue. However, this does not bode well when the weather is not cooperating.

We have not been able to generate revenue by renting our event space, which was a significant investment, as we have done in normal operations.

It has been a trying year for all small business owners as the amount of restrictions has been constantly changing. We are also tasked with the responsibility of upholding the health of our staff and guests resulting in additional costs. Small businesses have not been treated fairly in contrast to the treatment of large corporate entities. Many will never open their doors again. It is shameful to say that at the very least, we are not given the same privileges as the large corporations in the response to the ever-changing situation.

I urge you to consider allowing small businesses some concessions as you have done with large companies. The farm winery industry has been thrown for a loop this year. This is a blooming growing industry for the state, generating visitors and adding tourism dollars to one of the lowest rated tourism states. Our neighbors in Missouri seem to

have it figured out a better way. I believe it's time our leadership acknowledge what we bring to the table.

I would like to extend an invitation to all of you to see our operations. I suggest you take a look at the way shipping wine is regulated for us and allow us to ship or deliver wine to our customers without placing a limit on how much we can sell to them in a single year. Many large wine shipping brokers are sending wine into our state, but they are not generating local revenue, nor are they creating jobs within our state. There are many other issues we are dealing with on many levels of government and we do not always receive the support that is given to big business.

Small businesses are the backbone of our society. We are engaged in our communities in a way the larger corporations are not, yet they generate tremendous amounts of revenue for their out of state shareholders. I employ nearly 40 people from all walks of life. My business is engaged in the community in a very unique way; constantly donating to various local fundraisers, giving teens the opportunity to learn how to work on a farm in a suburban environment, supplementing income of many with seasonal jobs, sharing a unique farming experience with our guests from near and far and developing lifelong relationships.

Thank you for your time,

George Hoff

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