



March 16, 2021

TO: Representative Jim Kelly, Chair of Financial Institutions and Rural Development
FROM: Kerri Falletti, Director
RE: Proponent for House Bill 2431 to expand the ROZ program

Dear Chairman Representative Kelly:

On behalf of Cowley County Economic Development Partnership, I would like to offer support and endorsement of House Bill 2431 to extend and revise the Rural Opportunity Zone (ROZ) program. The following are additional proponent letters showing countywide support for revisions of ROZ providing workforce recruitment tools and assistance.

We have been struggling for several years to fill numerous vacant jobs. We continue to show declining workforce availability with low unemployment rate regularly between 3%-4.5%. The struggle is also evidenced by our population loss of nearly 500 individuals in the past two years, 900 in five years, and county population decline of -3.9% since 2010 census. This is a trend that we must turn around before there is irreversible negative impact on employers. Growth of some employers has been stifled because they cannot find workforce.

We work together through our partnerships to think of new and creative ways to promote Cowley County as a place where people will want to live and work. With proper marketing and support, this program has great potential for us to utilize. We have been building on our online marketing which targets those living outside of our area. To add ROZ to our recruitment marketing efforts would get us additional attention to those looking for work.

Our local businesses understand the vital piece they play in our community and support for such programs. The addition of the new option of first-time homebuyer down payment assistance will add to the incentives to encourage new workforce to locate in Cowley County.

I would request consideration for the county population cap be increased to 40,000. This would add only a few additional qualifying counties but set a cap with a substantial gap to the next group of counties. This would also permit counties the opportunity to make long-term planning and investments in marketing of the program.

Thank you for your consideration. I am available to respond to any questions as needed and encourage the passage of House Bill 2431.

Sincerely,

Kerri Falletti, CEcD
Director