

Chairman Longbine and Members of the Committee:

An important aspect with the passing of SB288 would be the local management and oversight of funds that would flow to rural Kansas communities within the defined Economic Growth Zones (EGZs).

A 2019 KS Department of Commerce Report about the Kansas Rural Opportunity Zones Program noted that, "solutions are best when they come from rural communities. Residents know best what can make their town better and what it means to prosper".

As a lifelong Kansan and Hesston native, I have served as the chairman of the board for the Hesston Community Foundation. I concur with the position of the Commerce Department report and recognize three keys to successfully deploying funds locally to maximize the benefit to a community.

Leadership – The Hesston Community Foundation was established in 2008 with a generous founding contribution from Brad Heppner. The board is made up of passionate, local leaders that help set guiding vision and oversight for the entrusted funds of the foundation.

Insight – It is vital to understand the needs of the local community. As the foundation board chair, I met with other community leaders of the schools, retirement community, senior center, and the City of Hesston to learn what opportunities and challenges exist and what it would take to meet them.

Execution - The foundation continues to grow and contribute to many worthwhile programs with grants that reach across the Hesston area and leave a positive mark on our students, senior citizens, child care center, parks and recreation department, and more.

In my role as foundation chair, I engaged with other community foundations in Harvey County and beyond who share the same passion for community improvement and also stand ready to offer effective local management and oversight of funds.

Passage of SB288 would, over the years, provide funds throughout the state for the benefit of many rural communities and Kansas citizens. For that reason, I urge you to support this exciting, innovative bill.

Sincerely,



Keith R. Martens