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JEFF PITTMAN

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Chairman Dillinger and members of the Senate Ways & Means committee--

Thank you for making the time to have this hearing on HB 2021. As you know, following our efforts on the House side last session, the Governor has issued an Executive Order that directs the Kansas State administration to formerly make an application to be a part of the Federal VA cost-share program for a new veteran home in Northeast Kansas.

Veterans Organizations across the state have made it clear that this is a top priority. My local constituents have made it clear this is a top priority. This is why I put these bills our last year and am proud to help usher this part of the effort forward. I rise in robust support for this bill.

HB 2021 is a companion funding component bill. It gives, when appropriate, bonding authority for the State's portion of the cost share program. The Federal VA program for cost sharing has the Federal government paying for 65% of the cost. These bonds would not be issued unless Kansas' application were awarded by the VA and only after request from the administration. The process to get to the top of the VA's cost share list could take years. The advantage of passing this bill is that it can accelerate our place on the bill as having pre-authorized funding is a criteria for success.

Kansas currently has just two veterans home and these are located in Ft Dodge and Winfield. Winfield was constructed in the 1940s and Ft Dodge is a collection of buildings that have grown old--ten dilapidated cottage style homes were demolished in the last years. Indeed, our current Kansas veteran homes are historic locations, yet they can be expensive and not purpose built in a way to be efficient to maintain. Surrounding states offers access to more homes and facilities.

Furthermore, studies have shown the concentration of veterans has shifted. A large majority of veterans live in Northeast Kansas, yet the two veteran homes in place are in the South and Southwest edges of our state. In the Northeast area of our state, we have federally run VA facilities in Topeka, Wyandotte and Leavenworth. The director of Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs estimated in a hearing last year that many of the ongoing costs would pay for themselves due to reimbursement programs from Medicare, Medicaid and the VA. We estimate the original bill I put forth was at \$17 Million, HB 2021 has been decremented. We originally were targeting 75-80 beds. This may not cover as many beds but I still rise in support. Our vets deserve it.

Senator Jeff Pittman

Leavenworth, KS SD 5