

Melissa Stiehler
Board Member of the Cross Border Network
Opponent Testimony of HB2397
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

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Chair Rahjes and members of the Committee,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am a board member of the Cross Border Network for Justice and Solidarity and a resident of Topeka, Kansas. The Cross Border Network aims to support workers across the Americas, including immigrant workers here in Kansas. We are opposed to HB2397, which would prohibit conveyance of certain real property in this state to foreign adversaries.

This bill is too broad and overreaching, which could be devastating to non-citizen workers here in Kansas, regardless of their legal status.

“The secretary of agriculture may, in the secretary's sole discretion, adopt rules and regulations to add or remove a government or non- government person from the definition of ‘foreign adversary’ but only after giving due consideration to the risks to state and national security and the economic costs and benefits of such action.”

This seems to mean that the Secretary of Agriculture could weaponize this title against any non-citizen person without regard to their lawful status, regardless of the unenforceable caution urged within the text. This unchecked power is very concerning.

“...a foreign adversary shall purchase, acquire by grant, devise or descent or otherwise obtain ownership of any interest in real property located in this state.”

This seems to ban land ownership, including homes, farms, and businesses, from any non-citizen person the Secretary of Agriculture has deemed “a foreign adversary” - again, there seems to be no enforceable restrictions on how this title is designated.

I understand that there is a state interest in national security- but this bill is too vague to ensure that it is not weaponized against our non-citizen neighbors who are causing us no threat. Additionally, this legislative body has time and time again determined that immigration and related policy is to be handled at the federal level. Why should policy like this be handled differently?

In closing, I urge this committee to protect the people of Kansas from the threat of unchecked government overreach by voting no on HB2397. Thank you all for your time and I hope you take my testimony into consideration.