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House Federal & State Affairs Committee

Feb. 13, 2012

RE: HB 2712 - The Kansas Business Workforce Communities Partnership Act.

Thank you, Chairman Brunk and members of the House Committee on Federal & State Affairs for the opportunity to comment on behalf of our members in support of HB 2712. I am Leslie Kaufman, President/CEO of the Kansas Cooperative Council. The Kansas Cooperative Council (KCC) represents all forms of cooperative businesses across the state - agricultural, utility, credit, financial and consumer cooperatives. Cooperative enterprises serve members in every county in Kansas.

The Kansas Cooperative Council believes, first and foremost, that immigration is a federal issue. We share with many of you, disappointment that our federal officials have not acted aggressively to address workforce issues and secure our borders. However, individual state-by-state actions are not going to solve the underlying immigration issues our nation faces. Our association continues to urge Congress to be bold and tackle these important issues at the federal level.

Although our preference would be that Congress take-on this issue, we realize many across the nation, and here in Kansas, are tired of waiting. While we continue to believe enacting certain forms of state-level immigration enforcement is unwise, should this legislature insist in moving forward with some mechanism to address unauthorized workers here in Kansas, HB 2712 provides a workable alternative and thus, we support the Kansas Business Workers and Community Partnership Act.

Several other immigration proposals have come before the legislature in the past few years and multiple bills have been introduced this session. Many contain provisions we believe will unduly burden businesses and dampen the economic up-tick our state seems to be trending toward. As such, should you believe that some bill needs to be advanced, we respectfully ask that you support HB 2712.

HB 2712 presents a pro-economic growth approach to addressing undocumented workers. The proposal allows Kansas to develop a partnership with the United States Department of Homeland Security by which the State can manage undocumented workers. The workers that could become eligible to work under such a program could not be individuals deemed to pose a threat to individual safety or national security. The program is a work authorization program and it should not be confused with amnesty programs.

The bill outlines a funding mechanism for the program, so it can be self-supporting. Other immigration proposals introduced for consideration by this legislature have carried with them heavy financial burdens for the state, local governments, and businesses.

We appreciate the opportunity to speak in favor of HB 2712. We certainly hope the Committee will view this measure favorably.

House Fed & State Affairs

Date: 2-14-12

Attachment 13