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Written Testimony in Support of Sub HB 2595
Senate Committee on Judiciary

Chair Warren, Ranking Member Corson, and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Kansas Appleseed in support of Sub HB 2595. This bill establishes the Attorney Training Program for Rural Kansas Act—a targeted initiative to recruit and retain attorneys in rural communities. Kansas faces a documented workforce gap: while approximately 43% of Kansans live in rural areas, only about 20% of attorneys practice there.¹ Currently, 31 counties fall below recommended attorney-to-population levels, some counties have no practicing attorneys, and in many rural areas the median age of attorneys is significantly higher than the statewide average.² Outside the state’s five most populous counties, a relatively small share of attorneys serves nearly half of Kansas’s population.³ Without intervention, retirements alone could leave 87 counties without adequate legal representation.⁴

This shortage has tangible consequences for the justice system and for rural residents. Judges in rural jurisdictions often struggle to find available counsel for cases where representation is required. Existing attorneys are overextended and must turn away clients. Residents and businesses frequently travel long distances to obtain legal services, incurring additional costs in

¹ Kansas Judicial Branch. (2022). *Kansas attorney data profile: Rural Justice Initiative*.
<https://kscourts.gov/KSCourts/media/KsCourts/court%20administration/Rural-Justice-Initiative/Rural-Justice-Initiative-Kansas-Attorney-Data-Profile.pdf>

²Kansas Bar Association. (2026). *Rural attorney shortage in Kansas*.
<https://ksbar.org/?pg=You-Heard-It-Here&blAction=reviewEntry&blogEntry=137566>; Kansas Judicial Branch. (2022). *Kansas attorney data profile: Rural Justice Initiative*.
<https://kscourts.gov/KSCourts/media/KsCourts/court%20administration/Rural-Justice-Initiative/Rural-Justice-Initiative-Kansas-Attorney-Data-Profile.pdf>

³ Kansas Judicial Branch. (2024). *Rural Justice Initiative Committee final report*.
<https://kscourts.gov/KSCourts/media/KsCourts/court%20administration/Rural-Justice-Initiative/Kansas-Rural-Justice-Initiative-Committee-Final-Report.pdf>

⁴ The Beacon. (2024, December 20). *Rural Kansas lawyers are in short supply. Is there a solution?*
<https://thebeaconnews.org/stories/2024/12/20/rural-kansas-lawyers-are-in-short-supply-is-there-a-solution/>

time, transportation, and lost wages.⁵ For some Kansans, these barriers effectively place legal assistance out of reach.

Substitute for HB 2595 responds directly to the primary drivers of the rural attorney shortage—educational debt and workforce pipeline constraints—by establishing two complementary incentive programs administered through a state-supported advisory structure.

First, the bill creates a Law Student Training and Stipend Program administered in partnership with Kansas law schools. Eligible students who commit to practicing in rural Kansas may receive stipends of up to \$3,000 per academic year for up to three years while completing their law degree. In exchange, participants agree to begin full-time practice in a rural Kansas community shortly after bar admission and serve for a defined period tied to the years of support received.

Second, the bill establishes an Attorney Training and Loan Repayment Program to support licensed attorneys who live and practice in rural Kansas. Under this program, eligible attorneys may receive repayment assistance covering principal, interest, and related educational loan expenses of up to \$20,000 per year, with total assistance capped at \$100,000 and participation limited to five years. By directly addressing the financial realities of legal education, which often leads to well over \$100,000 in debt, the program reduces a central barrier to rural practice.

The legislation is carefully structured to ensure accountability and fiscal responsibility. Assistance levels are capped, eligibility is clearly defined, and the program includes a sunset date, allowing the Legislature to evaluate outcomes. A dedicated fund administered through the state's judicial administration framework ensures that resources are used solely for workforce development in rural legal services.

Kansas is not alone in confronting this challenge. South Dakota, North Dakota, Illinois, and Nebraska have all enacted similar programs that offer stipends and/or loan repayment options.⁶ Since 2013, South Dakota and Nebraska have retained 32 and 39 new attorneys in rural counties, respectively.⁷ By adopting a comparable approach, Kansas positions itself to strengthen access to justice and maintain the effective functioning of local courts.

Access to legal representation is a cornerstone of a functioning justice system. Substitute for HB 2595 provides a practical, evidence-based strategy to ensure that geography does not determine whether Kansans can obtain legal assistance.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to support Substitute for HB 2595.

⁵ Kansas Judicial Branch. (2024). *Rural Justice Initiative Committee final report*.

<https://kscourts.gov/KSCourts/media/KsCourts/court%20administration/Rural-Justice-Initiative/Kansas-Rural-Justice-Initiative-Committee-Final-Report.pdf>

⁶ Harvard Law School Center on the Legal Profession. (2025). *Incentivizing rural practice*.

<https://clp.law.harvard.edu/knowledge-hub/magazine/issues/legal-deserts/incentivizing-rural-practice/>

⁷ South Dakota Unified Judicial System. (2025). *Rural attorney recruitment program*.

<https://ujs.sd.gov/for-attorneys/rural-attorney-recruitment-program/>; Stateline. (2023, January 24). *Lack of rural lawyers leaves much of America without support*.

<https://stateline.org/2023/01/24/lack-of-rural-lawyers-leaves-much-of-america-without-support/>

Thank you for your time,

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