

To: Senate Ways & Means Committee, Senator Carolyn McGinn, Chairwoman
From: Jim Sipes, Kansas Farm Bureau
Date: February 18, 2020
Re: Testimony in support of SB 375– FORWARD Transportation Program

Chairwoman McGinn, Chairman Waymaster and members of the Committee, on behalf of Kansas Farm Bureau I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 375, creating the FORWARD Transportation Program. KFB is the state’s largest general farm organization representing more than 30,000 farm and ranch families through our 105 county Farm Bureau associations. Our members and our fellow Kansans rely on a well thought out and even stronger constructed series of highways across this great state.

I am here in support of the legislation that authorizes a new transportation program, FORWARD ([SB 375](#)) because KFB policy states:

“The **mobility** of Kansans, the **public health and safety** of our citizens, and the **growth and development of all segments of the state’s economy** require coordination in construction and maintenance of a comprehensive transportation system. **We support a well-designed, adequately funded transportation system for the state of Kansas.**”

The goals of these bills aim to **improve traffic safety, reduce congestion, expand broadband access, improve the health of our highways system** and **maintain our competitive advantage** in transporting goods. These actions will benefit all areas of our state – from my hometown of Manter in Stanton County to the greater Kansas City and Wichita metro areas.

Agriculture and agriculture related industries support 245,539 jobs and account for approximately 13.4 percent of the Kansas’ Gross Regional Product (GRP). A quality transportation system is critical for ensuring the continued success of this industry and keeping the economic engine of Kansas running smoothly.

Additionally, the rural traffic fatality rate is more than double the fatalities in urban areas. FORWARD will allow the Kansas Department of Transportation to make more safety improvements that will help reduce fatalities across the state. In addition to improving safety, these infrastructure improvements and upgrades are necessary to handle agricultural equipment. There are more than 11,300 bridges across Kansas in fair or poor condition. FORWARD prioritizes highway preservation work, which is critical for restoring the health of our highway system and ensuring goods can be transported to market as cost-effectively as possible.

Through FORWARD, Kansas will establish the broadband infrastructure grant fund. This will allow for us to increase broadband access across our state and expand the economic opportunities of Kansans. Expanding these services will provide farmers more tools to improve yields, operate at greater efficiency and add tools necessary for safety and emergency response. It also improves telemedicine, allows individuals to manage their

finances online, expands classroom tools and generates more job opportunities that will allow young people to stay in their communities.

FORWARD maintains the \$8 million promise that every county will receive transportation improvements. This means all areas of the state will benefit from FORWARD and helps ensure rural and urban areas are well connected.

Our members understand the importance of making investments that last. FORWARD's rolling program approach allows the state to be more flexible to handle unprecedented changes and responsive to shifting needs. Farmers are constantly having to adjust to changing markets and weather conditions and it's nice to see Kansas implement a more business-minded approach to delivering transportation.

Kansas farmers operate in a global market and a better transportation system allows us to maintain a competitive advantage throughout the world. It's important that we do not fall behind on investing in our infrastructure here in Kansas and passing FORWARD ensures that we won't.