

February 3, 2022

SB375

Proponent

Written Testimony Only

Mr. George R. Eakin, President & CEO

Osborne Industries, Inc.

Dear Senate Fed & State Committee:

This letter is written testimony on behalf of Senate Bill 375. Osborne County is not unlike any rural county in the State of Kansas which has seen years of population decline. However, there is a bright star in the future and if we can work together, we can repopulate rural Kansas. I returned to Osborne in 1987 and served on the Osborne City Council for 25 years with the last 17 years being the Mayor. At the same time, I have been employed by the largest employer in Osborne County and since 2011 have served as President and CEO. We have experienced multiple issues in recruiting employees with the major issue being quality housing. There are many houses in Osborne and approximately 12% being unlivable or will require major investment to restore. Osborne has free land for those willing to construct a new house, but this has been met with resistance owing to the costs of new construction.

During these past 25 years, we have diligently investigated ways to provide housing for those seeking to return to rural Kansas. The primary challenges have been to find the resources needed to make this possible. I have had numerous meetings with investors and construction people regarding housing and ultimately always came to the same conclusion that it was not possible to construct affordable housing in Osborne and allow any type of return on investment for those willing to invest.

I believe there is a bright future for rural Kansas since we have been receiving much interest of people desiring to move to Osborne. This can be understood by a philosophy we have here based on our 100-year life cycle. To understand this better, let me share with you an observation that was given to me more than 20 years ago. If you were asked to explain your definition of success, what would it be? I would suggest that if this question was asked of everyone in this room, we would have as many different definitions as the number of people questioned. But, if we think about the 100-year cycle of success starting at the foundation of this great country, the United States of America, you will recognize that the first 100 years was driven primarily by one concept, the Homestead Act which is symbolized by the Arch in St. Louis. Go West Young Man Go West. Our ancestry was obviously successful since they found their 160 acres, stuck the flag, and made it successful. However, the land available in the late 1800's ended and a new 100-year cycle was beginning.

The second 100-year cycle was driven by the Industrial Revolution or mechanization. No longer were families and children needed on the farms and thus they were encouraged to go to college and go to the City where money was to be made. This second 100-year success cycle was driven by Go To The City Young Man Go To The City. And correctly, there was lots of success found in the cities during this

time period. This seemed to be ending during the late 1980's owing to what was called the Information Super Highway. We all know it as the World Wide Web now. Thus, the second 100-year cycle was being ended by the advancement of Telecommunications. The ability to do work from a rural location as successfully as being in the city was now achievable. Therefore, we believe that the third 100-year success cycle will be seen in the events of Go To The Country Young Man, Go To The Country. In fact, this belief has driven Osborne Kansas to have fiber optic communication to every home and business in the community.

The ability of remote work became even more popular during the recent pandemic which caused many of us to be closed into our homes and rely on telecommunication for our work and social life. There are many other reasons that rural living is desired, but the main point is that additional housing in rural Kansas is necessary. Relocating to rural America is the beginning of their successful life. There are many jobs available in rural Kansas which require education and skills. Therefore, there is a bright star ahead, if we can work together to solve this housing crisis that exists.

We are interested in whatever it will take to repopulate Osborne and Osborne County to the point that we are exploring ways to improve immigration into rural Kansas. After all, our entire country has been founded by immigration of people from Europe and other countries.

Think about what lies ahead and how you can make a difference in someone's success cycle and the success of the State of Kansas. We certainly appreciate your willingness to consider the positive outcomes of Senate Bill 375. We thank you for your consideration of this testimony and your support of this bill.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "George R. Eakin, President". The signature is written in a cursive style.

George R. Eakin, President
Osborne Industries, Inc.
Osborne, Kansas