



TO: Senate Committee on Assessment and Taxation

FROM: Debbie Bruner, Chief Executive Officer

DATE: February 6, 2025

RE: Senate Bill 69 – Proponent

Minneola Healthcare is grateful for the opportunity to provide comments in regard to Senate Bill 69.

My name is Debbie Bruner, and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of Minneola Healthcare. I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of the Rural Opportunity Zone (ROZ) program. This program has been an invaluable tool in our efforts to recruit and retain medical providers in rural Kansas.

In the past 12 years, Minneola Healthcare has successfully recruited three physicians through the ROZ program, and we are currently working to bring in a fourth. Recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals in rural areas remain a constant challenge, as we lack many of the amenities that often attract providers and their families. Programs like ROZ help level the playing field by offering meaningful incentives, such as Student Loan Repayment Assistance and the 100% State Income Tax Credit, which make rural practice a more viable option. These benefits not only help us bring providers to our community but also allow them to establish roots, invest locally, and build long-term connections that support retention.

While the ROZ program has made a significant impact, we believe there is an opportunity to modernize it further by offering additional incentive tracks. We encourage the Committee to consider amending the program to include:

1. **Homebuyer Down Payment Assistance** – Helping ROZ participants purchase homes in our communities strengthens local housing markets and increases the likelihood that providers and other professionals will remain in rural Kansas after their commitment period ends.
2. **Childcare Stipend** – Access to affordable childcare is a major factor for families deciding where to live and work. A childcare stipend would remove a critical barrier and make rural communities more attractive for professionals with young children.

- 3. Pre-Employment Monthly Support Stipend** – We recommend adjusting or removing the current \$10,000 earned income restriction that limits the impact of pre-employment stipends. Under the current structure, any financial support provided to recruits before their official start date is counted toward their earned income, and if it exceeds \$10,000 per year, it disqualifies them from the ROZ program. This restriction limits our ability to offer meaningful stipends that could help ease the financial burden of relocation and transition into rural practice. By modifying this restriction, organizations could provide more impactful financial support to individuals prior to their employment, in lieu of a traditional sign-on bonus. For example, hospitals and healthcare organizations could offer a monthly stipend to medical students in residency as they prepare to transition into practice. Ensuring these stipends are classified as recruitment incentives rather than earned income would maximize their effectiveness and allow rural communities to remain competitive in workforce recruitment.

We recommend that these new incentives align with the current Student Loan Repayment Assistance track, providing up to \$15,000 in support. Expanding the range of incentives available will make the ROZ program even more effective in attracting and retaining a strong workforce in rural Kansas.

On behalf of Minneola Healthcare, I urge the Committee to support the reauthorization and enhancement of the ROZ program. Strengthening this initiative is essential to sustaining rural healthcare and ensuring that Kansas remains competitive in workforce recruitment.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Debbie Bruner
Chief Executive Officer
Minneola Healthcare