

February 13, 2023

Rep. Ken Rahjes, Chairman  
House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee  
Kansas State Capitol  
300 SW 10<sup>th</sup> St.  
Topeka, Kansas 66612



Dear Chairman Rahjes and Members of the House Committee of Agriculture and Natural Resources,

My name is Jody Hoener and I am the President of Healthy Bourbon County Action Team. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 2331, creating Lehigh Portland State Park.

The last ten years has led me to many community and business development activities, — including increasing access to alternative transportation and creating spaces for public recreational activities.

I am honored to be here today to support the creation of Lehigh Portland State Park. Living in a county just East of Allen County, I have had the opportunity to visit and experience the Lehigh Portland area many times: on bike and on foot. It is a beautiful amenity that allows for anyone who knows it is there to take advantage of the more than 14 miles of trails throughout the property, as well as scenic vistas and overlooks.

I see many community leaders and advocates here who have worked diligently on Lehigh in many aspects: volunteers who have created the trails, Lola Industries members who have gifted land and allowed for the creation of trails to spur economic growth in our region, county and city representation that supports these efforts because they know how important they are to the vitality and sustainability of our rural areas. So many people have had integral parts to play in the process of bringing Lehigh Portland Trails to fruition. So many people are hopeful the next step in the future of this amenity is Lehigh Portland State Park.

I have worked alongside many of the volunteers and staff who have put their literal blood, sweat and tears into creating Lehigh Portland into what it is today. Together we also created a regional trail network connecting Allen, Bourbon and Crawford counties called, Prairie Pathways. This work intermingles so well into the creation of Lehigh Portland State Park. The Prairie Pathways route runs very close to Lehigh. And Lehigh is already connected into the Prairie Spirit State Park and the Southwind Rail Trail (an all-volunteer built and maintained trail). So many paths already lead directly into Lehigh!

As a region, we have seen the positive economic impact trails have made on property value, business climate, health outcomes and overall quality of life. Beyond that, increasing access to

outdoor recreation is an evidence-based solution to health outcomes and thereby directly impacts workforce growth goals.



It is widely understood that business' follow where the talent pool is, and people live where they can enjoy a quality of life. This means living in a community that allows families access to diverse recreational opportunities and to safe non-motorized transportation options.

The creation of Lehigh Portland State Park will have positive local, regional, and statewide impacts for future generations to come. It leverages local strengths and maximizes return on investment. Infrastructure will be built to incentivize tourism, encourage rural revitalization, build healthy populations, and create business friendly environments.

As a region we have seen the positive impact on many goals whether they are economic, community, tourism, health outcomes, and so much more. We certainly have every reason to celebrate this opportunity Iola Industries is providing by gifting the state Lehigh Portland with the intent of it becoming a state park.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to future of Lehigh Portland State Park and all the benefits it will have for the state of Kansas, especially those of us in southeast Kansas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jody Hoener".

Jody Hoener

Resident of Bourbon County