

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 91

Chair Erickson and members of the Committee,

My name is Melanie Addington and I am the Executive Director of the Tallgrass Film Association in Wichita, Kansas. The association is a 21-year-old non-profit organization that has been nationally recognized by numerous national film magazines, and actor and Sundance Film Festival founder Robert Redford. He testified to Congress on behalf of the National Endowment for the Arts saying: Local art-driven events like the Tallgrass Film Festival not only have a positive impact on Wichita's economy but also add to the quality of life in this city.

At its most basic level, Tallgrass Film Festival is a place to see films from independent filmmakers, or those outside the traditional Hollywood studio structure. We showcase films from around the world but also focus on Kansas filmmakers. But I am here today to speak not just for those independent filmmakers but on behalf of all storytellers on the importance of having the right to work in Kansas.

Kansas is synonymous with film and television history and legacy, not just from the *Wizard of Oz*. Storytellers such as Kansas natives Oscar Micheaux, Buster Keaton, and Gordon Parks paved the way for new ways of storytelling. Wichita native Hattie McDaniel was the first Black Oscar winner. Elle Schneider is an independent filmmaker who lived in Lawrence, KS for a while and is working on a documentary about Centron Corp, an Oscar-nominated film studio that was in Lawrence for forty years. And of course, *Superman* is from Smallville Kansas, and *Dennis the Menace* is from Wichita. And anyone who has watched the 15 seasons of *Supernatural* knows that while set in Kansas, they never once stepped foot in the state to film.

Today we have David Parks who moved back to make films in his father's home state. We have Sharon Liese, Oscar winner Kevin Willmott, Max Thomas, and many crew like him and we have up-and-coming students throughout Kansas with great storytelling sensibilities and a growing scene statewide of independent filmmakers.

Our local filmmakers are already here, already telling stories, but having incentives will mean steadier work leading to long-term economic growth. As Schneider said, "Arts go where artists can live. With housing crises in Los Angeles and New York, being a filmmaker with a stubbornly independent streak means turning to states with low cost-of-living." But they are moving to states where incentives and production are going. Let's turn Kansas into a place for artists to come home.

We have seen great stories on television and in theaters due to the rise of productions in states with incentives such as Montana. In the past couple of years, the state served as a pretend setting

for Scotland in *Robert the Bruce*, while also telling Montana stories such as *Yellowstone*. In the three seasons they filmed there, they brought in \$70 million or a little over \$20M per year.

We had screenwriter Ryan Redcorn at Tallgrass this year to talk about the success of filming in Oklahoma on the hit show *Reservation Dogs*, which is now in the running for numerous Independent Spirit Awards. That show is part of a larger impact. Oklahoma lawmakers are luring production studios and creating local jobs with a \$30 million rebate program to shoot in the state. \$240 million has been pumped into the state's economy in the last year and a half.

One of the shows, *Tulsa King*, was destined for Kansas City and the impact has been about \$23 million for season one with a renewal for another season. We have also recently lost *Fargo* season 4 in the Kansas City area, *Thank You For Your Service* - set in Kansas but filmed in Georgia (Dreamworks, Dir. Jason Hall); and *Somebody Somewhere* (HBO/Duplass Bros) set in Manhattan and with exteriors only filmed here. Bridgett Everett has provided testimony to the importance of film incentives in bringing shows like hers to the state. *Hide Your Eyes* (Alcon Ent) is set in Kansas and held off filming due to no incentives but may revisit if they pass. We have a crew base but many have to leave the state to work. Kansas is now only one of 13 states without incentives, leaving money on the table.

But film incentives are only one piece of the puzzle. They can help attract film productions to the state which more importantly brings economic benefits such as job creation ranging from hiring college students to be assistants to local caterers and construction crews. The non-Kansans brought to the state to work also support our local counties and cities and the overall Kansas economy by spending money on goods, services, hotels, and more.

But, tourism dollars are also on the line. I moved here from Mississippi where I helped filmmaker Tate Taylor and Mississippi Film Office reinstate film incentives. After losing much of their crew base to Louisiana and Georgia when incentives were ended, it took several years to rebuild the success of the oldest state film incentive program in the country.

One such film that shows the power of tourism dollars in Mississippi was *The Help*. Even today, the dollars pour into Greenwood for film tourism and have forever changed a Delta town with new high-end boutique hotels and fine dining. I for one never go out of state or out of the country without looking up some of my favorite films to see where they were filmed. I was deeply disappointed to learn the Donut World in Burns, Kansas in *Mars Attacks* was not still there. *Paper Moon* was filmed in Hays, McCracken, and Wilson, Kansas with many of the locations still there and with Wilson planning an anniversary screening and tour of locations this year.

Look at *Wizard of Oz*, never filmed here, but its deep ties and affiliation to Kansas, make it a stop for many. Many of our guests to Tallgrass over the years have rented cars to go see

Dorothy's House or the Oz Museum. Strataca in Hutchinson is home to the largest collection of film and television prints and makes it a point to highlight this as part of its tour. Film tourism can be the next piece of the puzzle. We have the crucial pieces all waiting to forge ahead and make a huge impact on all of Kansas.

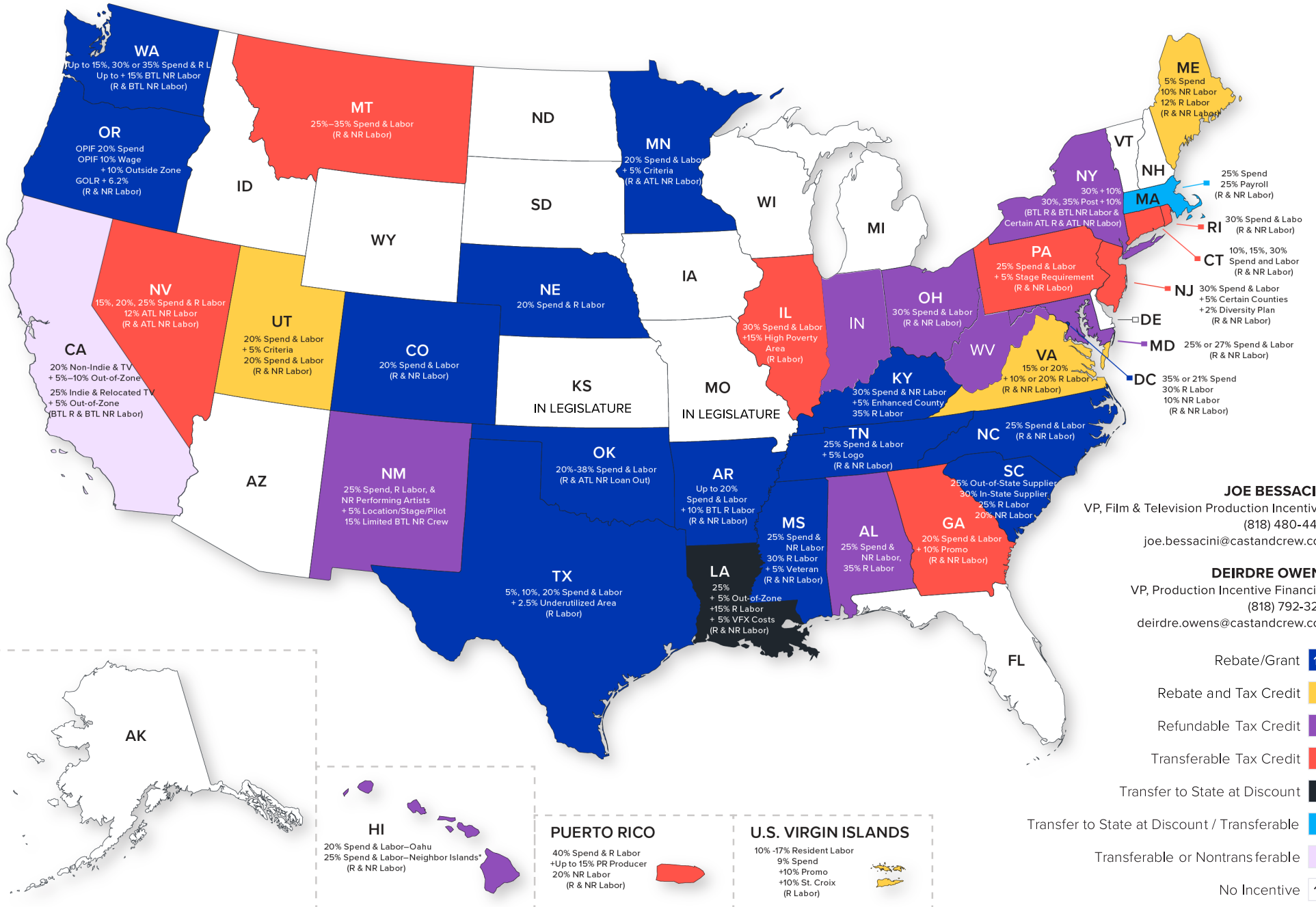
Please move SB 91 from this committee to the full senate and vote yes. This is an economic win for all of Kansas. Thank you.

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