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**Testimony on HB 2480 to
The Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
Dr. Bill Brown
Animal Health Commissioner
Kansas Department of Agriculture
January 27, 2016**

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Schwartz, and members of the committee. I am Dr. Bill Brown, Animal Health Commissioner for the Kansas Department of Agriculture. I am here to express the department's support for HB 2480 to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the Kansas Brand statute, and to make changes to the three counties in western Kansas that fall under a County Brand Option.

Kansas has a longstanding recognition as one of the nation's leaders in the cattle industry. With more than 6 million head of cattle and calves on ranches and in feedyards across the state, this industry is the largest sector of Kansas agriculture. In addition to providing support to our state's cattlemen and women in terms of animal disease control and traceability and assistance with import and export regulations, the Kansas Department of Agriculture has, since 1939, administered the Kansas Brand statute. Though brand inspection is not mandatory in Kansas, brands have and continue to provide a visual means of identification, especially in cases of strayed or stolen livestock.

Currently, the department maintains a registry of more than 17,000 brands and manages the market brand inspection program. Each year more than 450 new brands are registered. Over the past 77 years, the statute has been updated multiple times to reflect the changing needs of the livestock industry.

In accordance with the current statute, brand inspection shall be performed in areas designated as brand inspection counties, which include Hamilton, Kearney and Wichita counties. Current Brand statutes impose strict rules related to ownership, sale and purchase, and transport of cattle originating in these three counties. While the department supports the ability of individual livestock owners to utilize brands as a visual means of identification, the current requirements in Hamilton, Kearney and Wichita counties are burdensome and not reflective of current industry practices.

KDA convened a stakeholder group consisting of livestock producers of varying sizes, Kansas Livestock Association, Kansas Cattlemen's Association, Kansas Farm Bureau, livestock marketing association, livestock market owners and more to review the entirety of the Brand statutes. Statutes were evaluated on their relevance to today's livestock industry, protecting producer property rights, and ensuring statutes did not place an undue burden on producers. After these meetings, KDA, through HB 2480, proposes changes to the Kansas Brand statute to reduce the inspection burden. Brand inspection will be available upon request but will not be mandated under statute. Further, the department will continue to coordinate with a special investigator who

assists local law enforcement with lost, stray and stolen livestock, coordinating investigations between agencies and victims.

Livestock brands will continue to play an important role in showing ownership of cattle in Kansas, and changes proposed in HB 2480 will simply reflect the current needs of Kansas cattlemen and women. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I will stand for questions at the appropriate time.