



**PROS OF CON
CONCORDIA'S YOUNG PROFESSIONALS GROUP**

Testimony on HB2298

**Presented to
House Taxation Committee**

**By
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Chairman Kleeb and members of the House Standing Committee on Taxation, it is my pleasure to provide written testimony in favor of HB2298, removing the sunset on the Rural Opportunity Zone program.

Cloud County is designated as a rural opportunity zone. Like many of the ROZ counties, we have our share of challenges: aging citizens, a decline in population, and a rather limited workforce in comparison to our more populous Kansas cities. When trying to recruit professionals to our county, we compete with locations that have much higher salaries and endless shopping and entertainment options. Our greatest export is our kids, a trend we work endlessly to reverse.

I represent a group of young professionals in Concordia called the Pros of Con. We are 40-50 strong and are people between the ages of 21 and 40ish who are rural by choice. With strong schools, a community college, safe streets and neighborhoods we cannot believe people would choose to live anywhere else. Much to our chagrin, they do from time to time. Our designation as a ROZ county is starting to help turn that tide in our favor.

At first, the student loan repayment program was little more than a flash in the pan. You see, it required that counties provide the match and many counties could only provide funds for the initial group of students to participate. For Cloud County, this meant that only two students would be sponsored for the entirety of the program. A change in the administration of the program has allowed entrepreneurs and business owners to provide the match for the loan repayment to the counties which has completely opened the door for greater participation. Now, we can add student loan repayment along with no income tax for new residents as a benefit for many of our companies and organizations looking to hire. The change additionally allows entrepreneurs to provide their own student loan match, lessening their financial burden as they invest their money in creating jobs in rural Kansas.

While our organization is confident in the future of our communities, we are fully aware that we need every little bit of help we can get. We recommend the passage of HB2298 to remove the sunset on the ROZ program.