

February 13, 2023

House Tax Committee

Testimony on House Bill 2182

I grew up in Sterling, a one-stoplight town in Rice County. I lived across the street from the local college theater, where I acted in community plays from the age of eleven. Eventually, my love of acting took me from the University of Kansas' drama department to The Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, and finally to dream roles on stages and studios in New York City. I've appeared on such TV shows as *Law and Order: SVU* (which required me to shave my head), *The Good Wife*, *Suits*, *NCIS*, *Blue Bloods* and HBO's *Paterno*, to name a few. I've performed with the likes of Philip Seymour Hoffman, Lucy Liu, and both Kevins Kline and Bacon. I am not famous. I am what you call a "working actor" in the truest sense of the phrase.

Last March I auditioned for a show whose working name was *The Untitled Tulsa Project*. Taylor Sheridan, the mastermind behind the hit TV-show *Yellowstone*, was the showrunner. In researching the role, I discovered that this show, which debuted last November as *The Tulsa King*, featuring Sylvester Stallone – was originally called *The Kansas City King* and was meant to be shot in the KC area. Why, you might ask, was the show's location changed? Quite simply, it was because Oklahoma offered film incentives that Kansas did not.

Just as Kansas didn't get the show, I didn't get the part. However, as happens in my career, I moved on to the next role: A guest appearance on the NBC medical procedural *New Amsterdam*. Unfortunately, Kansas hasn't moved onto the next project...because it hasn't positioned itself to attract new productions. This means I must travel outside of the state to make my living. This is a shame, since the rise of self-tape auditions – coupled with the post-Covid decentralization of the film industry – means I can live where I want. For me, that means living in rural Saline County, Kansas.

Instead of waiting for productions to come to Kansas, I've decided to create my own: This June, with the help of Kansas-born collaborators, I will executive-produce and star in *The Game Camera*, a short film set in Kansas. Were we to shoot this film in Oklahoma, we could save an estimated \$12,000 against our \$60,000 budget, thanks to that state's innovative film incentives. The thing is, I don't want to shoot in Oklahoma--or anywhere else for that matter--and pretend it's Kansas. I want to shoot in Kansas, so I will. This means I'll be paying more out of my own pocket to eventually see it in film festivals, but it will be worth it to see that money going back into rural Kansas communities.

Sadly, a simple love of the Kansas landscape doesn't inspire most filmmakers to invest in our state. Not when they can they can save money by taking their productions elsewhere. But development initiatives like House Bill 2182 can lure future film projects here. Developing--and keeping--local talent will lead to more Kansas-based productions in the future.

Ultimately, this initiative is about attracting and sustaining human capital in Kansas. When my New York collaborators learn that I come from Kansas, they inevitably make a *Wizard of Oz* joke. And while I wholeheartedly agree that "there's no place like home," I'm frustrated that the only cinematic reference most people have for our state is a movie that debuted 84 years ago, and was shot on a soundstage in Southern California.

It doesn't have to be that way. With your help, we can reinvent the stories people tell about Kansas, by shooting *in Kansas*, in a way that benefits actual Kansans. In developing a vibrant film industry and reversing the creative brain drain, we will make our state richer, in both the artistic and economic sense of the word. It is my hope that one generation from now, the next eleven-year-old small town girl who dreams of becoming an actor won't have to leave Kansas to put her dreams into motion. Thank you.

Kristen Bush