Kathryn Mitchell Buster
Mount Mitchell Prairie Guards Board Member

February 26, 2026

SB No. 473
Proponent

Chairman Rahjes and members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding Senate Bill 473.

I am Kathryn Mitchell Buster, one of the five grandchildren of William Izott Mitchell who donated 30 acres of his father's Wabaunsee County farm to the Kansas Historical Society in 1953. I am also a founding and current board member of the Mount Mitchell Prairie Guards who since 2006 have managed and developed my grandfather's gift into the present-day Mount Mitchell Heritage Prairie Park.

Our family encourages the passage of Senate Bill 473, amending K.S.A. 75-2731, so that the title to the Park's original 30 acres can be united with the 134 acres that have been added since that legislation's passage. This legal unification will allow the entire Park to come under the authority of one management entity.

Our family is extremely pleased with what the Prairie Guards have accomplished over the last 20 years to fulfill our grandfather's wish for a public park commemorating the Connecticut Kansas Colony, known also as the Beecher Bible and Rifle Colony, and in memory of our great-grandfather, Captain William Mitchell.

These accomplishments include:

Expanding the Park from 30 acres to 164 acres

Re-creating 100 acres of native prairie from previous farmland

Developing a nationally recognized historic site and preserving a remnant tallgrass prairie

Building a new Park entrance and access road with visitor amenities including an informational kiosk, electricity, water, restroom, and internet service

Building 3.5 miles of walking trails, including ADA compliant pathways

Installing picnic tables, and fire resistant memorial benches

Listing the Park and Mitchell Farmstead on the National Register of Historic Places as the Mount Mitchell Heritage Prairie Historic District

Registering the Park with the National Park Service as a Network to Freedom Historic Site commemorating the Underground Railroad

Attaining Star Attraction status within the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area

Advocating successfully for the extension of the Native Stone Scenic Byway to include Mount Mitchell

Applying for and receiving Kansas Department of Transportation tourist attraction status to erect brown attraction signs on Highway 99 directing travelers to the Park

Developing working relationships with local residents, educators, community leaders, state and federal government agencies (Kansas Tourism, KDW&P, US F&WS, KDOT, KSGS) and regional Native American tribes

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please pass Senate Bill 473, which will allow the Prairie Guards to continue their good works and eliminate any legal irregularities for the next generation of those preserving our State's history.

Sincerely yours,

Kathryn Mitchell Buster