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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony in Support of HB 2781

House Bill 2781 – Junior Officers' Quarters at Fort Dodge

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I rise in support of HB 2781.

House Bill 2781 authorizes the State Historical Society to acquire the Junior Officers' Quarters at Fort Dodge in Ford County and to establish and maintain it as a state historical landmark.

On paper, this bill is straightforward. The backstory is not.

For several years, this building has been on a demolition list. It sits on state-owned land currently governed by the Veterans Affairs agency. Because of that structure — state ownership but different agency governance — progress has been slow and complicated.

Multiple budget cycles included proviso language to prevent demolition while discussions continued. Those provisos were necessary because no permanent agreement had been reached. Without legislative intervention, this historically significant structure would likely no longer exist.

The Junior Officers' Quarters is one of the few remaining original Fort Dodge structures. It represents an important part of southwest Kansas history and military heritage. Yet southwest Kansas currently has no state historic site.

This legislation resolves the structural problem.

HB 2781:

- Declares the building to possess historical interest to the state
- Authorizes acquisition in fee simple by the State Historical Society
- Places the property under the control and management of the State Historical Society

Most importantly, this bill follows a negotiated agreement.

Local and state organizations have come to the table. An agreement has been reached. There is alignment. There is a path forward. This transfer allows those partners to proceed with preservation, restoration, and development of what would become southwest Kansas' first state historic site and museum.

From an appropriations standpoint, this is about clarity and stewardship:

- It removes the need for repeated proviso language.
- It resolves inter-agency limbo.
- It prevents further deterioration while agencies debate procedure.
- It honors prior legislative intent to preserve the building.

This is not a new concept. It is the culmination of multiple years of work.

We have blocked demolition.
We have facilitated negotiation.
Now we need to formalize the solution.

HB 2781 provides the clean statutory authority necessary to complete the land transfer and place the building under the proper historic preservation framework.

Members, sometimes appropriations work is about dollars.
Sometimes it is about finishing what we started and protecting an asset before it is too late.

This bill does that.

I respectfully ask for your support of HB 2781.

I will happily stand for questions.

Jason Goetz

Representative District 119