LANSING REGIONAL SmartZone

1000 S Washington Ave, Ste 201 | Lansing, MI 48910
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Michigan House Economic Competitiveness Committee
Anderson House Office Building
124 North Capitol Avenue
Lansing, MI 48933

Dear Members of the Michigan House Economic Competitiveness Committee,

I am writing in strong support of House Bill 5031 and the renewal of SmartZone tax increment financing in my role as Director of the Lansing and East Lansing Regional SmartZone. This legislation is essential to sustaining Michigan's ability to grow high-technology companies, commercialize research, and retain the talented entrepreneurs who will shape our state's future economy.

Across Michigan, SmartZones have a strong and measurable record of success. From 2011 through 2024, SmartZones statewide supported more than 25,000 technology companies through services, helped form more than 1,700 new companies, created more than 12,000 new jobs, retained more than 46,000 jobs, and helped companies secure nearly 6 billion dollars in total capital investment. These outcomes reflect a proven and accountable model for supporting technology commercialization and startup growth throughout the state.

Behind these metrics are real founders and real stories. SmartZones serve as the anchor that connects entrepreneurs to community, resources, and opportunity. That founder journey is something I know personally.

More than a decade ago, I left my faculty role at Michigan State University to co-found Signing Savvy, a software as a service company and American Sign Language learning platform that has now served more than 35 million learners across every U.S. state and in countries around the world. While our software-based business could operate from anywhere, I was seeking an anchor to the community. That led me to the Technology Innovation Center in East Lansing, where I found not only workspace but a network of founders who encouraged one another to think bigger and build real companies here in Michigan. Today, I work out of the Technology Innovation Center again as Director of the Lansing Regional SmartZone, helping other founders navigate that same journey and build high-growth companies here in Michigan. I recently reflected on this full circle experience in a 517 Magazine column, *Taking Leaps with Wild Dreams, Anchored by Our Tech Community*.

Every day, we work with founders at many stages of the entrepreneurial journey. We support student innovators protecting their first patents, MedTech and biotech companies building high skill jobs, international firms choosing Michigan as the place to launch their United States operations, and emerging startups demonstrating how technology developed here can compete globally, along with many others building and scaling companies across our region. Many of these companies have

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submitted letters of support describing how SmartZone services helped them explore new markets, secure investment, hire talent, and build relationships that would not have been possible otherwise.

When technology companies can increasingly operate from anywhere, it is more important than ever for Michigan communities to maintain strong local ecosystems that anchor innovation and opportunity. SmartZones provide that anchor, and I strongly encourage your support of House Bill 5031.

Sincerely,



Jillian Winn
Director, Lansing and East Lansing Regional SmartZone
Lansing Economic Area Partnership (LEAP)