

Chairman Luick and members of the committee. My name is Tim Hiatt, I keep my bees in the southwestern part of the state. I oppose this bill (SB 2343).

Beekeepers get permission from landowners to place hives. State law requires that the location, the name of the beekeeper, and the name of the person who owns or leases the land be reported to the state department of agriculture.

Beekeepers exchange contact information and visit annually with the landowner or leasee. Beekeepers also post the name, phone number, and state-issued ID number of the beekeeper at the beehive location. With this system in place, if there is an issue with the bee hives at a location, the landowner can contact the beekeeper to correct the problem.

This system is resilient but sometimes it's challenged. A while back, a landowner who had my bees in her pasture was told by the person leasing the land that they want to rip it up for planting, and the bees need to be moved. The landowner had lost my contact info and forgot that my phone number is on the hives at the location. So, she called her sheriff's department and asked what she could do. The sheriff's office asked if she could remember anything about the beekeeper. She said that maybe they were from Bowman. So, her sheriff's office contacted the Bowman County sheriff's office, and they called me. The bees were quickly moved. Had the landowner forgotten where I was from, the sheriff's office instead would have referred her to the department of agriculture. With her name as landowner and the county she is in, the state would have given her my name and phone number.

But there may be a few beekeepers who break the law and place bees without permission, or who don't give the department of agriculture the required information. In this case, the sheriff's office and the department of agriculture's database of registered locations aren't much help. If this happens, state law provides for the department of agriculture to notify the offending beekeeper, and a week after notification of the illegal placement, the hives can be seized and disposed of by the department. Or, if the department can't locate the beekeeper, state law provides a process for the hives to be seized and disposed of, and for that beekeeper's permission to place bees in the state to be rescinded. There is a strong disincentive for beekeepers to ignore the law.

There are many hive locations within a 1/2 mile of a highway and which don't bother anyone. Rather than inflict major damage on all the state's beekeepers, we should rely on the current system and use it as it is. New laws won't change the behavior of scofflaws, and the existing rules can easily address hive placement problems.

Please do not pass this bill. I'm happy to answer questions. Thank you.