

Date: March 9, 2016

To: House Committee on Commerce,
Labor and Economic Development

From: Larry Wolgast
Mayor, City of Topeka
President, League of Kansas Municipalities

Re: SB 338
Testimony in Support

Thank you for allowing me to appear before you today and present testimony in support of Senate Bill 338 on behalf of the City of Topeka and the League of Kansas Municipalities and its member cities.

SB 338 would change current law regarding abandoned structures by expanding the definition of abandoned property and revising the definition of “blighting influence”. Other conferees have or will talk to you more about the changes in the law. I want to visit with you about conditions that exist in Topeka and other Kansas cities that make SB 338 necessary.

Because of recent and, in some locations, continuing downturns in the economy, cities are seeing more properties standing vacant. Too often, this leads to the structures falling into disrepair, becoming a fire hazard, becoming a source of criminal activity or becoming sanctuaries for vagrants or the homeless. This leads to a disproportional increase in police and fire calls to these properties. Failure to pay property taxes is also a result. As these properties fall further into disrepair, they have a blighting effect and resulting loss of property value of surrounding properties and the potential to become dangerous structures as they continue to deteriorate.

Here is an example: many of you are familiar with in the Westboro residential neighborhood in Topeka. It is an area containing some of finest and highest valued homes in the city.



3500 SW Avalon, Westboro Neighborhood

Cities have long had tools available to them to address issues when a dangerous structure is involved, but they have had limited resources to deal with abandoned property. SB 338 would give cities the same ability to deal with abandoned and blighted real estate as they now have when dealing with dangerous structures. SB 338 would allow rehabilitation action to be taken before the property became a “dangerous structure”.

Thank you for allowing me to testify on this matter. For these reasons we ask for your support of SB 338 and that you pass it out favorably.

I will be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.