

Honorable Steve Huebert and Members of the Local Government Committee:

My name is Ralph Wahl and I live in rural Riley County. I am here today in support of House Bill 2296.

Out of control government is not just in Washington D. C.; it is here in our local governments. Under Kansas statutes KSA 12-1757 thru 12-1770, public corporations, known as Public Building commissions, can enter into contracts to lease or rent properties to our local governments, creating huge amounts of debt without public input or consent. Public input on building projects generally makes the project better and voting tends to result in community consensus on the project. The way the law currently stands, two people can spend 50 to 100 million dollars or more in the space of two meetings almost in the dark. Compare this to a bond issue that has to be advertised and presented to the public which allows for public scrutiny and more deliberation by the board. As a school board member for many years I realize that more eyes on a project create more questions and more questions create better decisions. In a time when citizen participation is important to our government, the current law discourages this participation thus creating community conflict and distrust of government.

Under current statute, elected officials may be more influenced by local department heads and other unelected bureaucrats, bondsmen, and architects than by the voting public. This creates a lack of trust in the local government as well as leading to cronyism, poor decisions and ultimately, increased cost to the public. Bondsmen advocate for long term financing (40 to 60 years) in order to influence the officials with a lower annual expenditure. The officials do not take into account the cost of interest over the term of the bonds and the fact that they are indebting several future generations. I feel that this violates the intention of the cash basis law.

While this is not a direct assessment on our property, it is an indirect tax through general fund or sales tax and it still comes back to the local taxpayer. Ultimately the responsibility for payment lies with the local citizens, even if the majority did not want or approve of the project. I very well recognize the need for PBC's as a useful tool of finance because of the 3% general obligation bond limit placed on counties, but I am opposed to the process that eliminates or makes very difficult, voter input. Under the current statute, cities from 175,000 to 200,000 have the right to vote on PBC projects. I feel that all Kansans should have this right.

I urge you to support HB 2296.

Respectfully Submitted,

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