



Senate Bill 316

Oppose

Senate Committee on Assessment & Taxation
March 9, 2016

Written Testimony of Curtis S. Sneden, Vice President Government Relations
Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce

Chairman Donovan and Members of the Committee:

The Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce opposes Senate Bill 316 which accelerates the effective date of the “property tax lid” passed by the legislature last year and removes a number of important exemptions from the original legislation.

The Topeka Chamber certainly encourages economy and efficiency in government including controlling costs wherever possible. None of the Chamber’s over 1,000 business members wants to pay more taxes, property or otherwise. They understand, though, that if they are to prosper, they need to be doing business in a locale which is also prospering or which is at least attending adequately to public services and positioning itself to attract and respond to economic growth.

The property tax lid will impede local officials’ ability to do that. It will preclude elected officials from performing their basic duty of assessing an appropriate levy to meet local budgetary needs. The Topeka Chamber opposes state laws, like this one, which limit a governing body’s ability to timely respond to local needs. We believe local officials are capable of making responsible spending decisions, and being held accountable for them, within the parameters of current law.

While the Topeka Chamber did not support the property tax lid in the first place, at least that measure exempted certain crucial spending categories from the lid. Certainly, if a community manages to grow its economy, the local government ought to be empowered to respond by, for example, enhancing infrastructure. SB 316 removes infrastructure from the list of exemptions. This change exacerbates an already unfair and unworkable infringement on local government’s authority and leads to the undesirable outcome of an economy which might be growing but basic public services and infrastructure which are not allowed to keep pace.



Senate Bill 316

Oppose

The Topeka community considers economic development and quality of life to be high priorities. Indeed, two thirds of its voters agreed in November of 2014 to continue a half cent sales tax in order to fund continued economic development, better roads and bridges and other community amenities. The net result of all this activity will eventually be a growing thriving local economy and assessed property valuations are bound to rise.

Under the property tax lid in 2018, and sooner if SB 316 becomes law, even if this community's efforts are an unqualified success, if the economy grows and property values increase, the City of Topeka and Shawnee County could both find themselves strapped with budgets too tight to enable them to provide all but the most basic services. The other types of services which enhance our quality of life, such as excellent roads, parks and bike trails, would almost certainly be sacrificed as these governing bodies struggled to work within outdated budgets.

Therefore, the Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce opposes SB 316. Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Curtis S. Sneden, Vice President Government Relations
Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce
(785) 231-6025 ▪ csneden@topekachamber.org