

**Testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee**  
**SB 179 to amend the Public Employee Employer Relations Act (PEERA)**  
**March 11, 2015**

Madame Chairwoman and esteemed members of the Committee:

My name is Jim Bishop, I am President of SEIU Local 513, and a retired City of Wichita employee. SEIU Local 513 represents local government employees, City, County and Board of Education employees in Wichita, the City of Hutchinson and Ellis County. I am here today to speak against Senate Bill 179 on behalf of those employees.

Senate Bill 179 would effectively repeal collective bargaining for local government employees. It is not something that school districts, cities or counties have asked for. It is, to invoke an overused phrase, “a problem in search of a solution.” Moreover, SB 179 would harm the ability of local governments my members work for to efficiently serve citizens. The bill therefore violates the dictum to at least “do no harm.” While doing no one any good, SB 179 will harm local governments ability to do their jobs and represents further erosion of local control.

As I said, Senate Bill 179, which effectively ends collective bargaining at the local level, is a “problem in search of a solution.” The current PEERA statute gives local governments the right to “opt out” of the collective bargaining relationship with their employees’ organization. As a matter of fact, under current Kansas law, local government employees cannot form a union unless their employer firsts “opts in” or passes a resolution to bring the city, county or school district under the PEERA statute. PEERA covers classified staff in the public schools and non-supervisory staff at cities and counties. I repeat, unless a city, county or school board votes to “opt in” even a majority of employees cannot form a union and negotiate with their employers. The current law is purely voluntary.

Moreover, if a city, county or school district finds the relationship onerous, they can “opt out” at any time. Some examples—recently the City of Derby ended its bargaining relationship with its police union, in 1993 Reno County pulled out of its relationship with SEIU. The City Council in Hutchinson and the County Commission in Ellis County considered “opting out” of PEERA in 1999 but decided to remain under the law. So, to date, whether employees are allowed or not

allowed to have a union, and to negotiate an Agreement, is purely a local matter and if local governments or the citizens want to change things it is relatively easy for them to do.

For these reasons I just expressed, that SB 179 is a problem in search of a solution and violates local autonomy it should be voted down. But there is an additional reason just as important: SB 179 will harm the ability of local governments who have established a collaborative relationships with employee organizations to govern in a way that serves their citizens best. Here are some examples from SEIU's history.

--Beginning in 2011 and continuing through the present we have worked closed with the Wichita Public Schools to increase the efficiency of custodial services. I think it is accurate to say that we have been crucial to cutting costs and improving efficiency. Working with the school district we helped design and implement a training program for custodians and developed the skill set within the union to be able to "time study" and "cost out" custodial operations. We believe that the Wichita Public Schools have the most cost-efficient operation, and the cleanest schools, of any District in the state. We believe that our custodial services compares favorably with any private sector cleaning company. We invite the Legislative Post-Audit Committee to look at us if they want to be favorably impressed with what a large public school system (the largest in the state) can do.

--We have engaged in numerous cooperative projects with the City of Wichita. In 1997 and 2000, our negotiations teams completely revised the City's salary schedule. In later years we first agreed to furloughs to avoid layoffs in Wichita's Park Maintenance operation, then helped the City re-organize Park Maintenance Operations to save money and end the furloughs. We were able to do this because the Union was able to pool the collective knowledge and experience of the rank-and-file to come up with substantial cost savings. Another example is that, when the City considered privatizing city hall custodial services, we hired a consultant to review custodial operations and propose changes that improved the cleanliness of City hall while providing cost savings that made privatization unattractive.

--Nor has collaboration been contained to Wichita. In 2006 we negotiated and helped implement a "pay for performance" system with the City of Hays for Public Works and Park employees.

We ask that you not pass SB 179 out of committee. It is a bill that is a solution looking for a problem that does not exist. It harms the relationship of city, counties and school districts that do negotiate with their employees and derive benefit from a collaborative relationship. It weakens local control over local issues by removing collective bargaining from among the options that local governments can choose if they so wish.

Madam Chairwoman, members of the Commerce Committee, thank you for your attention to my testimony. Please say 'no' to SB 179.