



Testimony to Committee on Ethics and Elections SB 42 – Public Funds for Lobbying 5 February 2015

James Franko, Vice President/Policy Director

Chairman Holmes and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of a new requirement that public entities disclose their lobbying expenditures as defined in Kansas statute. If the issue concerns taxpayer money then taxpayers have a right to know how the money is being spent. It is a simple issue of transparency.

I would also encourage this committee to examine adding requirements that governmental organizations be required to disclose the money that they pay in dues or fees to organizations that lobby in behalf of different levels of government. If entities such as the Kansas Association of Schools Boards or League of Municipalities receive taxpayer funds from members, then taxpayers should be able to fully understand the commitment(s) and functions they're tax dollars are funding.

The simple truth is that different entities across this state have been seeking disclosure of this type of information for years. Unfortunately, the records kept are either inadequate to the task of government transparency or requests for the information are met with a presumption that is somewhat short of the legislative intent in the Kansas Open Records Law:

K.S.A. 45-216 (a) It is declared to be the public policy of the state that public records shall be open for inspection by any person unless otherwise provided by this act, and this act shall be liberally construed and applied to promote such policy.

Now, the bill before this committee today does not explicitly deal with KORA, but it goes straight to the heart of the larger issue – government operations should be transparent and open to question by taxpayers.

Not only is the amount of money spent on government lobbying government worthy of exploration but the simple fact that, in many cases, a governmental entity is actively lobbying the legislature for more money demands that governmental lobbying expenditures be made available to the public. These very well may be requests with broad support but with current disclosure requirements it is hard to know. While the bill before you today is not perfect it does provide for a basic level of transparency that should be considered absolutely necessary by this committee and the legislature as a whole.

I would also point out that the "Following the Money 2014" report from the U.S. Public Interest Research Group ranks Kansas' state spending transparency ranking as a "D-." Again, this may not deal directly with the issues raised in SB 42 but it certainly gets to the desire for taxpayers to have access to transparent, straight-forward records on how their money is being spent.

I would encourage the committee to remember the statement from our KORA law above and vote in favor of SB 42.