

## Testimony before the Senate Committee on Ethics and Elections

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Good Morning. Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony this morning. My name is Carol Barta, and I serve as the Assistant Director of the North Central Kansas Libraries System headquartered in Manhattan. I am speaking today in opposition to SB 368, a bill prohibiting using public funds or resources to promote question submitted election issues.

As an information professional I am keenly aware of the need for a person to have complete, accurate and straightforward information when making critical decisions. Whether buying a home, determining a medical procedure or voting on an issue that affects them, people need full disclosure. When seeking this information, people are most likely to contact one or more knowledgeable professionals. In the case of ballot questions, most of us expect our municipal governments to provide that information.

As written, SB 368 prevents municipalities, school districts and libraries from providing full information on ballot questions using staff time and other resources. It appears only to allow a legal notice of election and information that covers only cost. To make an informed decision a voter needs background information regarding the need, scope and goal of the question.

Some years ago, while living in Great Bend, I participated in a series of town hall discussions around the need for repairing and modernizing the schools in that district. It seems that it took several years of discussion and several iterations of the ballot question before anything was approved. Much information was needed from the school district and simply printing the dollar amounts of the bond would not have given the public enough information to make a clear-eyed decision. The process of discussion and information created a comprehensive plan that worked for that community.

Dissemination of information regarding a ballot question is needed in multiple formats. Few municipalities in Kansas have local television news. A few more have local radio and newspapers, but many don't even have that. To prevent a town from providing factual information in the form of a fact sheet or flyer is to keep the citizens in the dark.

Libraries are places where the public go to get factual information. We do not try to convince them of much of anything. We present the information and allow them to determine from the facts what actions they will take. SB 368 directly prevents libraries from fulfilling their role as a place to find information on local issues. Instead of housing complete information on a new proposed sewer system in a small town, the library would be allowed only to have information on the cost and tax implications of the project. In the past libraries have provided room for

displaying proposed projects, holding discussions, as well as a place for voters to pick up information to be read later at home. Librarians pride themselves on providing information on all sides of a question as equitably as possible.

Voters are entitled to all the information they feel they need to make decisions. SB 368 will prevent voters from being able to get that information from sources they trust.

As Thomas Jefferson said in 1820, "An enlightened citizenry is indispensable for the proper functioning of a republic." In this light I ask you to vote no on SB368.