



Strengthening & Equipping Neighborhoods Together

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455 SE Golf Park Blvd., Topeka, KS 66605

House Taxation Committee Written Testimony

BILL NUMBER: HB 2119

POSITION: Oppose

TESTIMONY BY: Johnathan Sublet, Executive Director, SENT Inc.

ON BEHALF OF: SENT Inc.

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FOR MEETING ON: 02.06.2025

Introduction: The Case Against Removing KAHTC

My name is Johnathan Sublet, and I am the Executive Director of SENT Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to the holistic transformation of neighborhoods in Southeast Topeka, including Hi-Crest—one of Kansas' most under-resourced communities. I am here today to ask you to oppose HB 2119, which seeks to eliminate the Kansas Affordable Housing Tax Credit (KAHTC) program. Doing so would undermine vital progress in addressing our state's housing crisis and threaten the stability of neighborhoods that rely on KAHTC to provide safe, affordable, and dignified housing.

Housing: The Foundation of Community Transformation

When SENT and Fellowship Hi-Crest began working in the Hi-Crest neighborhood in 2018, the community had not seen a single new home built in over 60 years. It had always been classified as an intensive care neighborhood under Topeka's health rating system due to a persistent cycle of poverty, crime, and deteriorating housing stock. But thanks to housing investments—including future projects for which we plan to use KAHTC funds—this story is changing.

In 2019, SENT completed the first new home in Hi-Crest in over six decades. To date, we have completed more than 25 housing initiatives, including building Topeka's first Net Zero house, ensuring affordable and sustainable housing for low-income families. SENT has plans to add over 200 affordable units in the next two years using a variety of tools. We also plan to develop another 200 in the two years following that.

Without the KAHTC, these projects and future developments, including the Johnson-Betts Meadows multifamily project (176 affordable units), would be at risk. We cannot afford to lose this vital tool at a time when housing demand is skyrocketing.



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The Scope of the Housing Crisis

The 2020 housing study conducted by the City of Topeka revealed that 11% of housing units in the city were vacant, with vacancy rates as high as 21% in central Topeka. Over 40% of Topeka's housing stock was built before 1960, highlighting the need for major reinvestment. The study also found:

- 5,000 affordable units are currently needed for families earning at or below 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI).
- An additional 4,000 affordable units will be needed over the next 20 years.
- Workforce housing is in high demand, with projections showing a need for 3,650 units for middle-income families making between \$33,000 and \$66,000 annually.

KAHTC: A Critical Tool to Address Housing Gaps

The KAHTC program has been essential in addressing these needs. For example, the upcoming Johnson-Betts Meadows development will deliver critically needed affordable housing units for families earning 60% or less of the AMI. Eliminating KAHTC would disrupt projects like this and significantly limit our ability to meet Topeka's housing goals.

SENT's projects are more than housing; they're catalysts for change. By combining housing efforts with job training, case management, and youth development programs, we've seen violent crime drop by 21% in Hi-Crest and significant improvements in family well-being and school performance.

Addressing the Needs of Kansas' ALICE Families

Kansas is home to over 455,000 ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households, including more than 50% of families in Senate District 19. These are working families struggling to afford basic necessities like housing, food, and transportation. KAHTC helps ensure they have access to affordable housing options, allowing them to focus on building financial stability instead of simply trying to survive.

Our work with ALICE families through housing, education, and wraparound services aligns with the Aspen Institute's 2Gen approach, addressing the interconnected needs of children and their caregivers simultaneously. By leveraging programs like KAHTC, SENT has provided long-term stability and created pathways out of poverty for families.

Why Kansas Needs More Tools, Not Less

As Kansas faces rising housing costs and a shrinking supply of affordable starter homes, KAHTC is more critical than ever. Nationally, the supply of starter homes has decreased by more than half over the past five years, and prices have surged 64% since 2016. The average first-time homebuyer is now 35 years old, up from 29 in 1981, due in large part to affordability barriers. Kansas cannot afford to lose this essential resource.



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The elimination of KAHTC would exacerbate housing insecurity and undermine efforts to stabilize neighborhoods like Hi-Crest, where nearly 52% of African American households cannot afford a quality two-bedroom rental. The need for affordable and workforce housing is urgent, and removing KAHTC would strip communities of the ability to address this demand.

Conclusion: A Call to Protect KAHTC

SENT's success in transforming Hi-Crest shows that housing is not just about shelter—it's about creating opportunities, stability, and dignity for families. KAHTC has been a cornerstone of this transformation, and its removal would set Kansas back when we need to be moving forward.

I urge you to oppose HB 2119 and protect the KAHTC program. Instead of eliminating tools, let's invest in more solutions to ensure that all Kansans—especially ALICE families—have access to affordable, dignified housing. Together, we can continue building a stronger, more prosperous Kansas.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Johnathan Sublet

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