



Testimony in Support of Senate Bill No. 7

Submitted by Audree Guzman on Behalf of Soldier Township

Hearing: House Local Government Committee

Monday, March 3, 2025, at 9:00 AM

My name is Audree Guzman, and I am submitting this written testimony on behalf of Soldier Township in Shawnee County, Kansas. I write in strong support of Senate Bill No. 7, which proposes critical updates to K.S.A. 80-113 and 80-1910 to increase township bonding limits.

The need for this legislation became evident to Soldier Township during the challenges we faced in 2024 when leasing a new road maintenance shop. Leasing limited our ability to invest in long-term solutions, ultimately increasing costs for taxpayers. With the upcoming need for a new fire station and training facility, the constraints of the current statutes will only exacerbate these challenges. Senate Bill No. 7 offers a pathway to address these issues by allowing townships to responsibly fund necessary infrastructure projects.

About Soldier Township

Soldier Township is the largest township in Kansas, spanning 63 square miles and serving a thriving population of over 15,000 residents. Our township provides essential services, including fire protection, emergency response, and the maintenance of 125 miles of paved roads. As the 26th largest municipality in Kansas by population, Soldier Township continues to grow, placing rising demands on our infrastructure.

The History of the Soldier Township Fire Department

Since its establishment, the Soldier Township Fire Department has grown alongside the community it serves:

- **1937:** Soldier Township Fire Department was established with a single fire truck and volunteer responders. The 1940 census recorded a population of 4,376.
- **1976:** The current fire station was built on donated land, housing the Fire Chief and Assistant Chief's families alongside four apparatus bays. At the time, the population was approximately 10,000, and the annual call volume was 132.
- **1985:** The department began 24/7 staffing with four full-time employees and 30 volunteers.
- **2023:** Today, the department operates with seven full-time staff and 30 volunteers, serving a population of over 15,000 and responding to more than 1,200 calls annually—an 800% increase in call volume since 1976.

Challenges with the Current Legislation

Current statutes severely limit the financial capacity of townships like Soldier Township. Established in the mid-20th century, these statutes cap bonding authority for townships at 1% of assessed valuation, with a stricter 0.5% limit for fire protection. For Soldier Township, with a 2023 assessed valuation of \$227 million, this translates to a maximum bond issuance of \$2.27 million—a figure grossly inadequate to meet the demands of a full-time fire department and road maintenance department.



To illustrate, the cost of constructing a modern fire station has risen dramatically. Over the past three years, fire station projects in Kansas have averaged \$350 to \$550 per square foot. Recently completed fire stations in Andover and Emporia cost \$6 million and \$11.5 million, respectively. The estimated cost for a new fire station and training facility in Soldier Township ranges from \$6 to \$8 million, far exceeding our current bonding limits.

Proposed Amendments in SB 7

Senate Bill No. 7 proposes the following amendments to address these challenges:

1. Incremental Bonding Authority Based on Population:

- Townships with populations not exceeding 5,000 may issue bonds up to 1% of their assessed tangible valuation.
- Townships with populations between 5,001 and 10,000 may issue bonds up to 5% of their assessed tangible valuation.
- Townships with populations exceeding 10,000 may issue bonds up to 10% of their assessed tangible valuation.

2. Enhanced Bonding Capacity for Fire Department Improvements:

- Increases the bonding limit from 0.5% to 5% of assessed valuation for township fire department improvements.

3. Aligning Debt Terms:

- Extends repayment terms from 15 to 20 years, reducing the annual burden on taxpayers.

Under these changes, Soldier Township's total bonding authority would increase to \$22.7 million for general obligations under K.S.A. 80-113 and an additional \$11.35 million for fire department bonds under K.S.A. 80-1910. These adjustments would enable the township to fund essential projects without resorting to high-interest leases, which unnecessarily burden taxpayers.

It is important to note that the decision to issue bonds would remain in the hands of taxpayers, as an election is required for any township bond issuance.

Conclusion

Senate Bill No. 7 is a necessary step to modernize outdated legislation and provide Kansas townships with the financial tools to meet the needs of today's growing communities. For Soldier Township, this legislation will enable the construction of a new fire station that ensures the safety, health, and preparedness of our residents for generations to come.

Thank you for considering this testimony. I respectfully urge the Committee to support Senate Bill No. 7. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,



Audree Guzman

Township Administrator
Soldier Township