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To: House Committee on Local Government
From: Shawnee County Counselor's Office
Date: February 27, 2025
Re: Testimony in Support for SB 104 amending K.S.A. 19-2670

Chair Bergquist and Members of the Honorable Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony on the proposed amendment to K.S.A. 19-2670, which would make the formation of a citizen's committee discretionary rather than mandatory when a county's population exceeds 170,000 but remains under 200,000. I strongly support this change, particularly as it applies to Shawnee County, the third most populous county in Kansas. Currently, Shawnee County is the only county affected by this statute, with an estimated 2025 population of 177,746. Shawnee County's population surpassed 170,000 in 2000 and has remained above that threshold ever since. Meanwhile, the Unified Government of Wyandotte/Kansas City has a population just short of the threshold, and both Sedgwick & Johnson Counties exceed it.

Purpose of K.S.A. 19-2670

K.S.A. 19-2670 et seq. was originally enacted in 1968 to ensure that counties experiencing population growth between 170,000 and 200,000 evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of their local government structures. The statute mandates the formation of a 59-member citizens' committee (based upon the requirements of the statute as applied to Shawnee County) to examine existing governmental frameworks, explore consolidation possibilities, and recommend improvements to streamline services. K.S.A. 19-2672. The goal was to provide a structured approach to governance assessment, ensuring that local governments adapt effectively to demographic and economic changes.

Unwieldy Nature of the Required Committee

The mandatory requirement to establish a 59-member citizens' committee presents significant challenges. A committee of this size is inherently difficult to manage, coordinate, and maintain focus, making it inefficient in fulfilling its intended duties. The logistics of assembling, organizing, and ensuring meaningful participation from 59 members add unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles without guaranteeing substantive improvements in governance.

Prior Consolidation Study Conducted

The fundamental purpose of K.S.A. 19-2670 et seq. is to study the efficiency and effectiveness of local government structures, including the potential consolidation of city and county governments. However, this objective has already been addressed in Shawnee County.

In 2005, a thorough consolidation study was conducted under K.S.A. 12-350, which proposed merging the City of Topeka and Shawnee County governments. A committee was duly appointed, an exhaustive analysis was undertaken, and a comprehensive report was produced. This existing body of work renders the mandatory formation of another committee redundant, as the research and analysis have already been completed.

Voter Rejection of Consolidation

Following the 2005 study, a final consolidation plan was presented to the voters. The electorate had the opportunity to review the findings and recommendations and ultimately rejected the proposed consolidation. Given this clear expression of the voters' will, requiring the formation of another committee to study the same issue is not only unnecessary but also an inefficient use of public resources.

The Statute Remains Available but Becomes Discretionary

It is important to note that amending K.S.A. 19-2670 does not eliminate the option of forming a study committee if deemed necessary in the future. The proposed change simply removes the mandatory requirement, allowing county officials and residents the flexibility to determine whether such a committee is warranted. This ensures that resources are allocated prudently while preserving the ability to revisit the issue if circumstances change.

Conclusion

The mandatory formation of a 59-member committee under K.S.A. 19-2670 is outdated and unnecessary, particularly in Shawnee County where consolidation has already been extensively studied and rejected by voters. This amendment allows for a more efficient, pragmatic approach to governance by maintaining the statute while making its application discretionary rather than obligatory.

I respectfully urge the committee to support this legislative change and remove an unnecessary mandate that no longer serves a practical purpose in Shawnee County.

Thank you for your time and consideration.