



## Testimony on HB 2609

The City of Wichita is pleased to offer testimony in support of House Bill 2609. The City respectfully remains opposed to attempts to erode home rule, as included in other tax lid proposals. As the elected leaders of the 385,000 Kansans that call Wichita home, we base City service priorities and property tax decisions directly on input from those citizens. The City also opposes efforts to place potentially onerous and unnecessary restrictions on the ability of local leaders to effectively do so.

However, we believe that HB 2609 may be an appropriate compromise between enhancing the voice of residents while protecting the long-cherished Kansas Constitutional concept of home rule. The bill would allow local residents to express concern over any proposed local budgets with a petition signed by only 10% of the local electorate. This is more effective for several reasons. It would enhance the power of citizens by providing a low threshold (10%) of the electorate to postpone and force an election on budgetary proposals. The petition process is also much easier for residents than participating in a local election – again something we believe will enhance the voice of residents. Finally, this process is similar to the existing processes under which residents may already provide feedback on proposed charter ordinances.

The bill also includes several important exemptions to the tax lid. One would exempt expenditures related to employee benefits. This is consistent with the tax lid laws that were in place before 1999. We also believe the exemption for federal, state or local disasters is appropriate. It would also be important to appropriately exempt the major rehabilitation of property in the definition of new construction. Wichita currently has several downtown rehabilitation projects underway which are revitalizing buildings which have remained vacant and underused for decades. Such improvements positively and directly impact the quality of life of all of our citizens.

The City of Wichita strongly believes in citizen engagement and professional financial management of the citizens' public resources. HB 2609 will enhance that process with a petition mechanism we feel is a prudent use of legislative direction. This bill avoids imposing burdensome or inflexible requirements on local governments, yet provides clear legislative direction on the importance of fiscal discipline and prudent property tax policy.