



1300 SW Topeka Blvd.
Topeka, KS 66612-1817
Phone 785-354-1174
FAX 785-235-3920

Before the Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee
Testimony as OPPONENT of SCR1602 (Written and Verbal)
Submitted By: Brian Wood
Legal Counsel, Kansas Organization of State Employees
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Chair Senator Tyson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Brian Wood, and I am legal counsel for the Kansas Organization of State Employees (KOSE). KOSE represents over 8,000 Executive Branch state employees, with covered employees in every Kansas county and legislative district. On behalf of those employees, I ask you to OPPOSE SCR1602.

SCR1602 proposes an inflexible, formula-based limit on state investments that restricts lawmakers ability to respond to taxpayer needs. This sort of constraint is often referred to as a “Taxpayer Bill of Rights’ or “TABOR” restriction. Although the concept has been debated in many states, the only state to adopt it is Colorado. There is a reason that states have not followed Colorado down this imprudent path. The Colorado experiment has failed resulting in the state’s inability to keep pace with necessary expenditures for core state services such as schools and healthcare.

After years of budget cuts resulting in the reduction of over 4,500 FTE’s from the state’s workforce since 2011 and creating short-staffing issues in many areas including our state’s hospitals and correctional facilities, SCR1602 would result in additional cuts to important state services and limit the legislature’s accountability to taxpayers. Lawmakers would be handcuffed by a rigid spending formula rather than being able to exercise the discretion vested in them by voters to meet the needs of Kansas residents.

SCR1602 is simply a bad idea for Kansas especially in light of the current budget issues facing the legislature. The legislature is currently considering ways to meet the state's obligations for school funding and other basic needs. Additional unnecessary restrictions placed on options available to legislators does nothing to help the problem. Kansas should join the long list of over thirty states that have debated and subsequently rejected TABOR as flawed policy.

For these reasons, KOSE respectfully requests committee members OPPOSE SCR1602. I will stand for questions. Thank you.