

# City of Baxter Springs

*\*Randall Trease, Mayor \*Debbie Weston, City Clerk  
1445 Military Ave. P.O. Box 577 Baxter Springs, KS 6671*

Date: March 14, 2017

To: Chair Caryn Tyson and the Senate Assessment & Taxation Committee

From: Randall Trease, Mayor

Re: Written Testimony in Support of SB 167

On behalf of the City of Baxter Springs, KS, I hereby formally submit our testimony in regards to the repeal bill SB 167.

The City of Baxter Springs is a small municipality that has strived since its inception to offer the truest form of our representative democracy to its residents. Removing our authority to raise taxes will seriously restrict our ability to combat the steadily rising costs of providing vital services to our community. Baxter Springs has faced several painful changes in the last 3 years; destruction from a tornado, the loss of a major retailer and a devastating flood. When these natural disasters befell our town, we were left to recover without federal assistance, which nearly drained the City. Then, the loss of the large retailer in town drastically affected our revenue from sales tax and forced us to lean more heavily on our property tax revenue in order to simply maintain our public services.

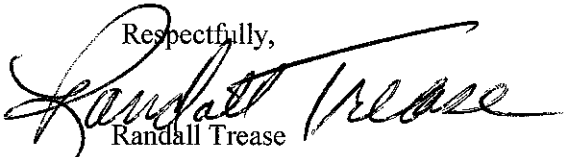
Relying on the CPI as a compass for the spending needs of our City is inadequate as it does not take into account the rising and differing costs of providing varied public services. Capping the flow of revenue will only lead to lay-off's, salary freezes and the inability to upgrade aging equipment. These negative changes will only lead to the reduction of the public services we provide in the areas of education, infrastructure and public safety.

Capping the property tax rates will then force our local government to fall back on revenue from sales tax and local fees, inevitably increasing them to make up for the loss. This increase will only further the negative impact on lower income families, and encourage them to leave our community in search for more favorable tax conditions. The cycle would then continue and increase in severity.

As a homeowner myself, I am not thrilled with the idea of increased taxes, but after witnessing firsthand the struggles our City encounters when providing the most basic of necessary services, I understand the dire need. Those who oppose this repeal would be well educated by spending a week in their City Hall and learning just how strained things can get. In an article from the Center on Budget & Policy Priorities, authors Lyons and Lav state that,

“Proponents of property tax caps claim that local governments are not spending taxpayers’ money efficiently and that limiting the property tax revenue they can collect will force officials to cut waste, while causing little or no harm to local public services. This argument, however, overlooks two essential points: 1) the costs associated with providing local services, such as health insurance and pensions for local employees, are rising rapidly and are expected to continue to do so for the foreseeable future; and 2) the majority of these costs are outside localities’ control.”

The City does not want this repeal passed so that we can pad our coffers and increase employee salaries. We simply want the ability to continue to employ highly skilled individuals, maintain and improve our Blue Ribbon schools and provide the kinds of services and protections that our residents deserve.

Respectfully,  
  
Randall Trease  
Mayor of Baxter Springs, KS

Resources:

Karen Lyons and Iris J. Lav, “The Problems with Property Tax Revenue Cuts”, <http://www.cbpp.org/archiveSite/6-21-07sfp.pdf>, June 2007.