

ANDOVER FIRE-RESCUE

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February 1, 2020

Senate Committee on Assessment and Taxation
RE: SB 294 – Oral Opponent Testimony

Madam Chairwoman and Committee:

I very much appreciate you taking the time to hear my opposition testimony to this bill. Andover Fire-Rescue and The City of Andover are opposed to SB 294 as it is fundamentally flawed.

We have a unique situation in Andover, Kansas. While many of our neighboring Kansas communities are struggling to explore new ways to continue to provide services to a dwindling populous, we are struggling to explore new ways to provide service to a growing community with a growing population. In 1994, we built a new station and responded to 261 emergencies. In 2019 we responded to 1505. Growth is real. Andover Fire-Rescue has been answering the call since 1955 and have committed to the Big 4; Do your job, treat people right, have an all-in attitude, and give all-in effort. SB 294 jeopardizes our ability to continue to provide needed emergency services to our neighbors.

Andover Fire-Rescue is an all hazards fire department as are most in our state. This means that no matter the emergency we will do our best within our resources to help you. The capabilities of our services are based on our unique infrastructure and risks to our citizens and community. SB 294 would have devastating consequences on our ability to provide these basic services in our community in 3 specific ways, the removal of an exemption for public safety, the inability to account for growth, and the inability to account for the expiration of tax abatements.

An exemption for public safety is vital. The bill would limit our ability to adjust to inflation of cost of apparatus, personal protective equipment, training expenses, and the ability to comply with unfunded state and federal requirements for public safety services. Rates of inflation for fire department specific equipment currently range from 4 to 10 percent. Your local fire departments must be allowed to adjust services rapidly and be responsive to changes occurring in our local environments. The inability to do this would exacerbate an already deplorable condition of aging apparatus, worn out or missing protective equipment and profound lack of access to technology by local departments. All of this would increase our state's risk from the dangerous effects of fire and medical emergencies. The State of Kansas has numerous examples of past incidents in which aging apparatus and equipment, and insufficient training resulted in incidents growing to

BIG 4!

historic size and complexity. I am confident you can recall fires that have occurred just in the last few years that have created some of the greatest losses in the history of our state. Fires are changing, we must be agile and able to not only react, but be proactive. Andover uses development tools available to us to spur growth, including tax abatements. This is an interesting position for a fire department. We are responsible for protecting additional property and persons, but have only delayed increases in the ability to pay for it. SB 294 would remove that ability altogether.

Whether abated or not, growth continues to put pressure on Andover Fire-Rescue's ability to provide service to our community. Not only is our call volume increasing, but the number of times we are responding to simultaneous emergencies is increasing as well. Growth must be allowed to increase our ability to provide services. Our current fire station was built in 1994. In 1994 we responded to 261 emergencies, in 2019 we responded to 1505. Growth is real and growth without the ability to increase service is a danger to our community.

Andover Fire-Rescue has recently undergone a comprehensive analysis of fire services performed by, CityGate. This analysis found that the community is underserved from lack of staffing and lack of stations. We are enacting strategic plans to meet these needs; however, SB 294 would crush our ability to add or maintain personnel and equipment to meet them.

It is my hope that this committee consider the implication of enacting Senate Bill 294 in its current form, which restricts us from fulfilling our community driven obligations to public safety. I understand the crucial need to provide this service within the economic confines of our community. I ask this committee to give careful consideration to the restrictions of this bill to public safety exemptions and inclusion of growth and expired tax abatements. Please do not pass this bill out of committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony and please reach out if I may be of further service.

Sincerely,



Chad A. Russell
Fire Chief
Andover Fire-Rescue