

**Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee
Written Testimony in Opposition to SB 294**

**Submitted by John Allison, Superintendent, Olathe
on behalf of Olathe Public Schools USD 233
and USD 229 Blue Valley Schools**

Friday, February 7, 2020

Chair Tyson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today in opposition to SB 294, a bill related to property taxes, public notice, and hearing requirements. As we understand it, this bill would apply to all taxing subdivisions and districts – including school districts.

It is important to acknowledge at the outset that we share a mutual commitment to transparency and accountability for taxpayers. Our districts' websites include budget documents to help patrons better understand how the district are spending their tax dollars, and our boards actively seek ways to make that information more accessible.

Our boards believe SB 294 establishes new requirements that seem incongruent with current law, creates additional administrative burdens and costs, and could result in the loss of funds necessary to appropriately support the overall vision for our districts – preparing students for *their* future.

The local taxes levied by our boards of education, as part of the school finance formula, have mechanisms to do one or more of the following: impose limitations, require a vote of the public, provide public notice, and allow for protest petitions. Each of these actions is intended to allow taxpayers a voice in the process and create budget stability and certainty.

Under current law, school districts are required to adopt their annual budgets by August 25th. As part of the budget process, the boards of education thoughtfully consider the resources necessary to provide educational programs and services that our students need to be successful, and the impact that any local levy might have on the community. They take this responsibility seriously and are held accountable for those decisions by patrons in the districts.

Before approval of the budget, our boards of education conduct public hearings where taxpayers have the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns about the proposed budget and tax levies.

The testimony offered by the Kansas Association of School Boards addresses each of the local taxes levied by school districts in greater detail. They have done a good job outlining how the provisions of SB 294 conflict with existing law. For that reason, we'd like to focus on the impact this could have on our districts' resources and on student instruction and learning.

Olathe and Blue Valley school districts are proud of the high-quality workforce we have in place to support student learning. Each Spring, the districts begin negotiating contracts for the following school year *before* the budget is officially adopted in August, to ensure that teachers and staff are in place when students return. We are able to enter into these negotiations in *good faith* because of the certainty provided in the budgeting process and the legislature's commitment to a multi-year school funding plan, which includes the authority to levy local taxes.

Although SB 294 does not explicitly prohibit districts from raising the revenues necessary to fund the districts' budgets, **we believe that requiring districts to reaffirm the local taxes levied annually could impede our ability to negotiate in good faith and retain the high-quality workforce that our districts have developed.**

If the committee decides to work this bill, we would respectfully request that school districts be excluded. The school district budgeting process is complex and very different than other municipal governments and taxing districts, in part because of how education is funded in Kansas, but also because of budgeting timelines.

The new *additional* notification requirements in SB 294 are likely to have many negative, even if unintended, consequences for school districts. They will come at a significant financial cost to our districts and, in larger counties, could create new administrative burdens in the county clerk's office. At a time when schools are working to increase transparency and communicate more clearly with our patrons, this bill may add confusion for patrons. **New layers of process and confusion among patrons could result in the loss of funds necessary to appropriately support the overall vision for our districts.**

On behalf of our Boards of Education, we would like to assure members of this committee that we are committed to being effective and efficient stewards of taxpayer dollars, while providing an education that empowers all students with the skills and knowledge necessary to be prepared for their future.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony. Please feel free to contact me at jallison@olatheschools.org or (913) 780-8022 if you have any questions.