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House of Representatives



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March 17, 2021

Chairman Sen. Mike Thompson and Committee Members
Senate Utilities Committee

Subject: HB 2321 Urban Transmission Line - Proponent

Chair Thompson and Committee Member, thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of HB 2321, because I believe it is a good step forward. This bill is a negotiated and amended version of last year's Urban Transmission Line bill HB 2317, between Evergy and several community members in northeast Wichita.

In the summer to fall of 2018 Evergy (formerly Westar) installed 57, 105 ft towers in northeast Wichita. Some of them in the front yards of some residents. The community was shocked, devastated, and very upset. We felt, we were blindsided, disrespected, and discriminated against. And it appeared to a lot of us, Evergy was not listening to what the community saying, nor did it seem like they cared. As a result, the northeast community in Wichita has been severely impacted for decades to come because of the unsightly towers. The property values will be forever underestimated, and private properties will be much more difficult to sell, being near the tall towers.

Former bill HB 2317 was introduced (2019-2020) to require more extensive oversight and accountability of the huge public utility company. It included going through the siting process and conducting public hearings, all under the direction of the Kansas Corporation Commission, prior to placing electric transmission within the corporate limits of a city that is at least ¼ mile in length and designed to transfer 69 kilovolts or more of electricity.

This updated bill version is designed for cities with populations of 300,000 or more and is at least 2.5 miles in length and traverses 2.5 contiguous. It offers: 1) a six month notification to local governments with visuals prior to construction of a major electric transmission line with 69 KV, but not less than 230 KV; 2) notifies all landlords and tenants of record within 660 feet of the center line of the easement; 3) allows an open house for citizens to view plans and ask questions; and 4) news publication insertions; and 4) notifications within 660 feet prior to a major electric transmission construction in cities with populations over 300,000.

Although, I am pleased that this bill incorporates local government review and opportunity for the community to review the project ahead of time, I would prefer to see a 1-mile length and of course, I would love to see the huge towers in my district on East 11th and North Hydraulic replaced with smaller poles.

Finally, I encourage Evergy to expand their notifications via mail of upcoming major projects to more people that are indirectly impacted by a major electric transmission project beyond the 660 ft. And possibly, provide an attorney for those who cannot afford to put up a defense against eminent domain process and charge the cost to the overall project.

This transmission line upgrade in my District has been an eye-opening and unforgettable learning experience for me and many others. Hopefully, our experience with these large tower's installation will be a roadmap for other communities to get more involved in their local communities and for them to act early and try to work and communicate with their electric utility company.