

Testimony to the House Government Efficiency and Technology Committee
Representative Kasha Kelley

February 14, 2007
House Bill 2457 – Kansas Taxpayer Transparency Act

Chairman Morrison and Members of the Committee:

House Bill 2457 provides that, beginning on January 1, 2008, a layperson may, with ease, log onto one central website whereby he or she can perform an easy search to find complete information on receipts and expenditures in state government pertaining to any entity. In addition, the user would find the information to be downloadable, and they would be allowed to offer feedback as to the ease of use of the site.

In previous committee communications with regard to transparency, the question has been raised as to whether tax returns constitute part of the information to be made available on this site. The answer is, only in aggregate form as is currently available by the Secretary of Revenue. The private tax return information of persons and businesses is protected by statute. HB 2457 does not seek to divulge or reveal any of this confidential information, other than in current aggregate form.

HB 2457 works to outline, with specificity, the attributes of the site on the first page of the bill. The site would, as mentioned above, be searchable by keyword. In order to perform meaningful keyword searches, meta-tags would be employed, as they are currently for internet search engines. While there is no request for new information, the format for delivery of existing information will likely need to be tweaked.

Sidenote: Although not stated in the bill, it was earlier brought up in committee that perhaps a drop-down menu (by department) might be of interest as a means for searching. If searchable by menu, that menu should be an exhaustive list of all departments within state government, as well as other issues pertaining to government receipt or expenditure.

For ease and illustration as to the design of the site, an example may be helpful. We have a layperson who would like to know how much is spent on aging projects in the state of Kansas. He or she would search the site by a keyword such as “aging,” “elderly,” “department on aging,” or a similar word or phrase which reflects the subject of their search. The site would then return the complete budget allowance for the Department on Aging for the fiscal year being searched, as well as how the department spent these monies. Expenditures such as salaries and wages, capital outlay, monies dispensed for grants, contracts, subcontracts, debt payments, etc. would be line-itemed. That is to say that, when the search returns the “Department on Aging,” there appears an aggregate amount of dollars spent through that agency, as well as a complete listing of the department disbursement amounts that make up that aggregate amount. Each of these disbursements is a link to the additional requested information stated in the bill (the name and principal location of the recipient of the funds, the type of transaction, a description of the purpose of the funding or expenditure, and any other information that might pertain

to that expenditure). This additional information on the particular project or item allows the layperson to reasonably review not only how much was spent on the project, but also the scope of the project, where the monies were paid, etc.

While it is true that there is information already on the internet, it is not always quick or easy to retrieve. Additionally, it is not always locatable within one site. After unsuccessfully looking for specific financial information on state government myself, and after visiting with constituents about their desire to better understand the fiscal habits of state government, it is easy to conclude that a tool of this magnitude would be beneficial to and appreciated by many. Democrats and Republicans alike have voiced their desire to better understand what government is taking in, what they're spending, and what they're "putting on the credit card" for future generations. Allowing them to search, review and report on exactly where their dollars are going not only makes good sense, but it is good governance.

As a closing note, though not detailed in the bill, the inclusion of each entity budget (no re-formatting necessary) and its narrative would help complete any particular search for incoming/outgoing expenses. I would envision this most easily accomplished with a hotlink from each agency search.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to appear before you. At this time, I would stand for any questions.