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Testimony by Jennifer Stewart – Wyandotte County Public Health Department (Environmental) to House Committee on Judiciary Verbal Proponent for HB 2754 – February 16, 2024

Chair Humphries and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support of House Bill 2754, a bill which would allow counties to use home rule powers to exempt them from conducting school sanitary inspections. Our mission is to promote and protect the health and environment for all who live, work, and play in Wyandotte County.

Schools already see a lot of regulatory requirements and inspections, from entities such as the Fire Marshal and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. We believe tasking the local health officer with a similar role is duplicative to existing protections while also being vaguely defined for the local health approach. For example: there are no inspection requirements listed in the statute and each county must decide how to address the requirement. For the 2022-2023 school year, the Wyandotte County Public Health Department (WCPHD) inspected 65 facilities with zero major violations. The most common citations found were minor, like maintenance closets being unlocked and exterior trash containers not being closed during the time of inspection.

The local inspection requirement is also an unfunded mandate costly to taxpayers. For the 2022-2023 school year, WCPHD invested 100 staff hours conducting these inspections and logged over 1,100 miles in the process. It is duplicative of the other agencies that inspect, with no enforcement available for concerns or violations. We feel that it provides no meaningful value for Wyandotte County students and takes away the limited number of staff from program areas where we have sole enforcement responsibility, such as public pool and septic inspections.

In some counties, the school inspection requirement in K.S.A. 65-202 may make sense. We appreciate that HB 2754 preserves this requirement, while allowing counties that know the inspections are being handled via another means can charter out of the requirement per home rule authority. As such, the Wyandotte County Public Health Department asks that the committee recommend HB 2754 favorably for passage.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Stewart

Environmental Health Manager

Amanda Harrop

Environmental Inspections Supervisor