

COUNTY OF LEAVENWORTH

from the desk of Commissioner Mike Stieben

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January 8, 2024

Senate Committee on
Assessment and Taxation
Honorable Caryn Tyson Chairwoman
300 SW 10th St.,
Topeka, Ks 66612



RE: Support of LAVTR restoration SB196

Dear Senators;

Thank you so much for your service to the citizens of the great state of Kansas as members of the Kansas Senate. Senator Tyson, I appreciate you and your committee, allowing citizens to have the opportunity to testify and petition the government on important issues facing our communities.

Since becoming a County Commissioner in 2019 it has been my honor to represent the communities of Tonganoxie, Linwood, DeSoto, Springdale, and Jarbalo, as well as rural areas of southern and western Leavenworth County.

I wanted to convey to you the number one issue of concern to my constituents. That issue is the high level of taxation in the state of Kansas and for the purpose of today's hearing the high level of property taxes in this state.

Again and again, I hear the elderly, those on fixed incomes, and those with limited incomes, say the same thing, "Commissioner Stieben we are going to be taxed out of our homes". Others say, "Mike if something is not done, we are going to have to leave the state and move somewhere else."

This has been such a concern that in 2021 we formed a Property Tax Task Force, which has had five meetings, attended by many local citizens and government leaders, concerned about property taxes and willing to look for solutions both on the state and local level.

We have come to realize that this is not a simple issue with an instant solution. The Task Force produced a list of solutions both local and state and agreed on two specific state proposals:

1. Cap the tax on valuations/growth in valuation at a set amount- the SCR 1611, the legislation that passed the Senate last year, amount is 4%- this would limit surprise property tax spikes that have resulted in some Leavenworth County taxpayers seeing tax bills go up by 27% in just one year.
2. Restore funding for the Local Ad Valorem Tax Reduction fund (LAVTRF) SB196, the fund which was established during the depression era, and which was codified into state law in 1965 is specific in purpose to reduce property taxes. LAVTRF is currently supposed to transfer 3.63% of state sales and use taxes to cities and counties.

While the local citizens who attended the Property Tax Task Force meetings did not believe that these actions alone would completely solve the property tax issue, passage of these two measures could make a huge difference by allowing local governments to directly reduce property taxes dollar for dollar for each LAVTR dollar received. The Leavenworth County Commission has already passed a resolution requiring all monies received from LAVTR to be spent on property tax relief. If you feel it is necessary, you could add a proviso to the legislation limiting expenditures to only property tax relief. Remember, that from the beginning that has always been the purpose of LAVTR.

I am hopeful that each one of you will take the issue of property taxes and the struggles of our citizens under the burden of these high taxes seriously and with

concern. One important element of making these and other tax changes is to allow Kansans to plan their family budgets, long-term investment strategies knowing the tax rates without surprise spikes and creating the stability of a positive business climate that is predictable and stable for the long-term.

The current property tax structure is broken in Kansas because it has become a system where no taxpayer can know what their possible tax will be in the next 5 years.

Cordially yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Stieben", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mike Stieben

Leavenworth County Commissioner