

STATE OF KANSAS



**Senator Elaine Bowers
District 36**

**Legislative Modernization Committee
Testimony in Support of SB11
February 20th, 2023**

Thank you for your time today to testify in support of SB11. This bill would reauthorize the permanent placement of a life-size version of the “Ad Astra” sculpture on the grounds of the state Capitol. The bill would transfer approval authority from the Capitol Area Plaza Authority to the Capitol Preservation Committee. Under current law, the Ad Astra Sculpture Fund has been established; however, the bill would designate the fund as a no limit special revenue fund. No state monies will be used in the completion of the project. The bill would take effect upon its publication in the Kansas Register.

You will hear from former Senator Randall Hardy from Salina in a moment who was taking a walk around the capitol grounds and discovered a pedestal on the southwest side of the statehouse grounds (near the Docking Building) with no statue on top. The plaque states it showcases an 8’2” exact replica of the Ad Astra which sits at the top of the dome. In order to keep this idea moving forward, the Capitol Preservation over the years has attempted to address the unfinished plaza and last year formed a sub-committee to work with the revisors and researchers to move forward with the project. After consulting with Revisors Gordon Self and Chris Waggoner, it was determined new legislation would be needed to revitalize the project and ensure there is clear legislative intent to create the fund and complete the project. My previous sentence was short but the research of historical documents, reports, and minutes took weeks to complete even with visits to the archives at the Kansas Museum of History. The small statue could not be found in any reports and we concluded the artist was never paid for this piece of art for the Ad Astra Plaza. The Ad Astra 8’ statue is currently in Salina at Bergen’s Art LLC – owned by Rich Bergen and his wife Lynda Frazier Buehre who are in the audience today.

When you walk outside to see the plaza – you will see bricks with names of people who donated money to help complete the dome project – these represent only a portion of bricks as the remainder are also in Salina. Filler bricks are in place now waiting for the named bricks to replace them. The committee thought it was proper to finish the commitment made to them to place their bricks on Capitol grounds in the Ad Astra Plaza.

After this bill passes the legislature, fund raising will begin and a special fund has been established which Randall can discuss in more detail with you. I do find it interesting that 20 years ago the Ad Astra statue was placed on the dome and today we are talking about completing this project. SB11 is the beginning of finishing this project.

We have a few guests with us today I'd like to introduce: Chairperson of the Capitol Preservation Committee Patrick Zollner and the Interim Executive Director of the Kansas Museum of History, and Frank Burham with the Department of Administration. I'm happy to answer questions the committee may have and also introduce Patrick to the committee as the Chairman. As you all might remember our friend Jennie Chenn passed away unexpectedly during session last year. She had been the Chair of the Capitol Preservation Committee for many years and Patrick has stepped in to lead the committee. Patrick is here to answer questions as the chair of the committee and Frank is here to answer questions as the "boots on the ground" person.

In closing, we found ourselves talking about the 8'2" statue as the "little guy" as we searched for his history and where he fit into the project, and as we discovered – he didn't. Sadly, Dr. Richard Bergen passed away in April 2020 but his son Rich, who also worked with his father on Ad Astra (and many other projects), is with us today. It would be nice to see his father's legacy work to be finished on the statehouse grounds with SB11.

Senator Elaine Bowers

Just a brief history of the Capitol Preservation Committee - it was created by the Kansas Legislature in 2010 to approve renovation proposals in all areas of the Capitol, the Capitol Visitor Center, and the Capitol grounds to ensure the historical beauty of the areas are preserved, preserve the proper decor of those areas, assure that any art or artistic displays are historically accurate and have historic significance, approve the location and types of temporary displays, and oversee the reconfiguration or redecoration of committee rooms within the Capitol. As provided by KSA 2016 Supp. 75-2269, the Division of Legislative Administrative Services has the responsibility of implementing the recommendations of the Committee. The Committee is made up of 12 members, with the Governor appointing 3, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House each appointing 2, and the Minority Leaders of the House and Senate each appointing 1. The Committee's three ex officio members are the Statehouse Architect, the Executive Director of the State Historical Society, and the Director of the Creative Arts Industries Commission. The Governor has the authority to appoint the chairperson from the Committee's membership. Current membership of the committee is listed below:

Chairperson: Patrick Zollner

Senate

Sen. Chase Blasi

Sen. Elaine Bowers

House

Rep. Fred Patton

Rep. Valdenia Winn

Non-Legislative Members

Frank Burnam

Melinda Gaul

Tim Graham

Kate Van Steenhuyse

Will Lawrence

Sharon Wenger

Larry Wolgast