



Board of County Commissioners

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**Senate Committee on Commerce
HB 2336 - Proponent Testimony
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Chairwoman Erickson & Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of HB 2336. My name is Aaron Mays and I proudly serve on the Shawnee County Board of County Commissioners. The views presented in my testimony today are mine alone and do not necessarily represent the views of Shawnee County.

In recent years, Shawnee County has seen significant growth in many different business sectors. Insurance and financial sectors are booming. Manufacturing and logistics companies are relocating here and have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in state-of-the-art facilities that employ thousands of people. The private sector has recognized that Topeka and Shawnee County are open for business.

While we are proud of our economic successes, we have had unique challenges breaking into the aviation sector. These challenges can be attributed to several factors. The infrastructure at both Topeka Regional Airport and Billard Airport is old and in poor condition. Because the MTAA is prohibited from selling property, private investors are often hesitant to heavily invest in infrastructure which they cannot own. Time after time, we have been told by aviation companies that Topeka and Shawnee County are not prepared for large aviation companies to come here.

To have the airports ready for private investment, it will take public investment. The MTAA needs to build hangars. But they don't have the financial capability to do so. The \$1 Million bonding threshold in the current law was put into place before I was born. I think we can all agree that commercial construction prices have changed significantly since the 1970s. The proponents of this bill are working hard to offer solutions to the concerns expressed by potential tenants. For the MTAA to address those concerns with action, bonding needs to be a piece of the funding mix. This bill will better equip the MTAA to make the necessary investments to spur economic growth in the aviation sector.

My only concern with the bill is the continued inclusion of a specific dollar amount in the law. This will only be a temporary fix to this statute. If this bill were to become law as written, there is a strong possibility that the MTAA will need to return to the legislature requesting another increase. I would welcome an amendment removing all references to specific dollar amounts. This amendment would retain the maximum bonding authority of the MTAA at 1.85% of the total county assessed taxable value and would also eliminate the need for future legislation.

Both of the airports in Shawnee County have the potential to grow our local economy. We need to drive growth and would like to see that growth happen quickly. The bonding threshold has kept the MTAA from making large investments. Making capital improvements helps us recruit companies to Shawnee County. In order to capitalize on our county's economic momentum, the MTAA needs to act quickly. The first step in doing that is asking you to approve HB 2336.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.