

State of Kansas



Representative Ann Mah Kansas House of Representatives

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ETHICS, ELECTIONS, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
CHAIRMAN SEN. PYLE
TESTIMONY - SB 109

I speak today in opposition to SB 109. There seems to be a recurring and disturbing theme to legislation this year – to silence the voices of those who might speak against anything the Legislature wants to do. Instead of welcoming a diversity of opinions, the Legislature seems determined to hear only one voice – one that will agree with the majority party opinion.

SB 109 attempts to silence the voices of all municipalities in the state of Kansas. It may not have occurred to you, but township, school district, city, county, and other municipal officials actually have real jobs to do. Important jobs. They do not have the time to independently research every bill that is being shoved through this year, let alone call you to let you know what they think. The far more efficient thing to do is to pool resources and be represented by and educated by a single entity – a lobbyist. So not only is SB 109 a violation of free speech, it forces a waste of taxpayer dollars and resources by duplication of effort thousands of times across the state.

Of course, I understand why you wouldn't want to hear from local officials. Bills passed by the Legislature the last few years have done little to support municipalities and much to usurp their authority, reduce their tax base, and increase the number of services that must be locally funded. The public funds they use to pay lobbyists are raised locally, by officials on behalf of those they were elected to serve. Once again we have a nanny-state bill that removes local authority and substitutes the ill-advised wisdom of the Legislature.

The implications of this bill go far beyond municipalities. Health care providers, foster parents, farmers, and energy providers are just a few folks who come to mind who get public funds. The list is actually quite long. We need to hear from these Kansans and their lobbyists when bills impacting their industries come before the Legislature. Is this bill just an attempt to silence those who can bring the truth to the Capitol and talk about how the state is or is not doing its job? It appears so. The bill is so broad it's frightening in terms of the chilling effect it would have on public discourse on important issues.

In regard to Section 1(b) of the bill, I'm not aware of gifts bought with public funds being provided in the past, so I don't have a position on that section. But legislators who regularly dine at lobbyists' functions in the evening might have a concern.

There is no public benefit to silencing anyone in this building. I hope you will reject SB 109 in the public interest.