



Senate Bill 31 Support

Written Testimony submitted to the
Senate Committee on Ethics, Elections and Local Government

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Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

The Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce would like to express its support for Senate Bill 31, which gives cities tools to effectively rehabilitate blighted properties. The Topeka Chamber is generally highly protective of individual property rights. Cities, though, need to be armed with adequate legal mechanisms which enable them, when necessary, to return blighted areas within their communities to healthy, active neighborhoods and commercial areas.

The Topeka Chamber, in conjunction with a number of affiliated organizations, is working hard to make build a more prosperous future in Topeka and Shawnee County. The work of economic development has evolved in recent years. Civic and business leaders now understand that improving the quality of life in a community is as important as simply growing the number of jobs available. Employers can only relocate to, or expand in, cities with enough talented workers to fill their workforce needs. Young talented workers will only decide to live in a community which is healthy, vibrant and provides plenty of life-style amenities. So, Topeka's leaders are focused on improving the quality of life here. The results are evident in a downtown which is revitalizing, in a growing arts district in North Topeka, in an extensive bikeways network and in a parks system which has gained national prominence, among many other examples.

Quality of life is not just about discreet amenities, though. Ultimately, it is reflected most assuredly in a city's neighborhoods. Topeka has a proud tradition of neighborhood solidarity and activism. Many of its neighborhoods are among the most charming Kansas has to offer. However, neighborhoods in all corners of the city and in communities like it across Kansas, are marred by residential and commercial properties which have been abandoned and deteriorating for years. These properties pose a threat to the health and safety of the current neighbors and can render an entire city



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block so unattractive that prospective neighbors consistently drive right by. Despite the efforts of neighbors and city officials, maintaining the attractive quality of neighborhoods blighted by abandoned properties is all but impossible. The current legal tools available for cities to address the most egregious and destitute properties are inadequate, especially when the owners of such properties very often simply cannot be located. Senate Bill 31 will help.

The Chamber of Commerce represents the local business community and is inherently committed to preserving and protecting individual property rights from encroachment. Senate Bill 31 strikes a balance between ensuring, on one hand, that no well-intentioned property owner will suddenly find themselves stripped of their interests without adequate notice and due process and enabling communities, on the other, to finally step-in and put blighted properties back into the hands of organizations committed to restoring them.

For these reasons, the Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce supports passage of SB 31. Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

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