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Thomas County



300 N Court Ave., Colby, KS 67701

January 18, 2019

Chairwoman Tyson and members of the Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee

Thomas County is seeking legislative authorization to expand our county sales tax beyond the 1-1/4 cent currently authorized.

Thomas County is located in the center of a nine county area in the northwest corner of our state, with Colby as the County Seat. Our county population was 7,892 as of July 1, 2017, the date of the last census report from the Secretary of State.

Our current Courthouse was constructed in 1906 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings. It houses all of the county offices plus the Courts and ancillary court services. The space available for the Courts is inadequate as are the provisions for the safety of the public, court personnel, defendants and persons appearing before the bench. Our current law enforcement center was opened in 1976 to house the Sheriff's Office, Colby Police Department and Jail, with a capacity of eleven inmates. Currently, the Sheriff reports an inmate population of twenty-two, with the overflow housed in surrounding county jails.

The community has discussed for several years the need for a new consolidated Criminal Justice Center, to house the Courts, County Attorney, Sheriff's Office, Jail and Colby Police Department.

In November, 2017 with 60% of the qualified electors of Thomas County voting, approval was given for the addition of ½ cent sales tax for the issuance of 1-million 300-thousand dollar bond for the construction of a Criminal Justice Center. Our current Thomas County sales tax rate is 1-1/2 cents.

When bids for the project were let in October, 2017, they came in \$4 million above the projected \$12.5 million construction cost. We were forced to suspend the project due to the cost overage.

Therefore, we are seeking legislative authorization to levy an additional ¼ cent in sales tax to address the overage, subject to the approval of the electorate. Our effective county sales tax rate approved, will be 1 ¾ cents.

In formulating the ballot question, we will also include language that will permit us to use any surplus sales tax collected by the ¾ cent for the use in repurposing the current Courthouse for non-court county offices.

Thank you for accepting our written testimony and for your consideration of our request.

Respectfully,

Mike Baughn, Chairperson