Senate Committee on Assessment and Taxation
Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 191
Presented by Eric Stafford, Vice President of Government Affairs

Wednesday, March 20, 2019

Madam Chair and members of the committee, my name is Eric Stafford, Vice President of Government Affairs for the Kansas Chamber. The Kansas Chamber appreciates the opportunity to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 191, which adds another exemption to the public vote requirement for property tax increases beyond the rate of inflation, in this case for the purposes of expenses relating to transportation projects.

SB 191 allows for transportation expenses not exceeding 20% of the budget for the next year on projects certified by the Secretary of Transportation. As with other efforts to modify the public vote requirement, we believe the exemptions in place accommodate the needs of local government. Funding transportation projects through the property tax public vote requirement circumvents the ability for voters to decide whether funding of these projects should be a priority for their community.

We have worked with representatives of local government on solutions to address legitimate concerns where the tax lid needed to be amended (HB 2063). SB 191 is not a policy change we can support.

Property taxes are the least popular tax, and the sentiment of Kansas businesses continues to support the need for reductions in property taxes. Before the most recent reiteration of the tax lid went into effect, Kansas property tax revenues increased at a pace far exceeding the rate of inflation. We ask that we let the public vote requirement do its job and hold elected officials accountable if they believe property tax revenues must increase beyond the rate of inflation (plus the 16 exceptions) and hold a vote of the people they represent to determine if constituents support the need for extra revenue, specifically for transportation-related investments.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 191, and I am happy to answer any questions at the appropriate time.