



February 4, 2020

Representative Caryn Tyson  
Kansas State Capitol  
300 SW 10<sup>th</sup> St. – Room 123-E  
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: TESTIMONY FROM CITY OF WICHITA ON SB 294

Dear Chairman Tyson and members of the Committee:

The City of Wichita opposes SB 294. Wichita agrees with the objective of this bill: transparency to taxpayers regarding budgets and providing services that residents demand as efficiently as possible. However, the City remains opposed to attempts to erode local control and believes that this bill is technically flawed, creating an expensive reporting requirement for local governments. The current tax lid, which would remain in place, is a more reasonable way to ensure local government efficiency.

As the elected leaders of the 385,000 Kansans that call Wichita home, we base City service priorities and property tax decisions directly on input from those residents. The City of Wichita does not agree with any legislative efforts to erode that nexus between local resident service delivery desires, and the ability of local governments to meet and finance those service requests.

The City of Wichita values transparency. Our budget process includes numerous neighborhood meetings, more public hearings than are required by State statute, and innovative and expansive use of social media channels to share budget information with residents and collect feedback. In fact, the City was honored to receive the "Voice of the People" award for transparency and community engagement.

The City of Wichita is an efficient provider of services our residents want. The City has kept the estimated mill levy rate flat for 25 years. The City has increased spending on public safety by millions of dollars — because that is a resident priority. However, all other City spending has grown significantly below the inflation rate for many years. Each year the City of Wichita is millions of dollars below the State's tax lid.

If this bill passes, a local government that opted to increase the total amount of taxes levied, but not the estimated mill levy rate, due to new construction growth, inflationary price

increases, and increases in public safety costs (which are all allowed under the current tax lid law), would still be required to adopt a budget over the so called "certified" mill levy. Being over the certified mill levy would then require the County to send a customized notification to every City taxpayer — which would be a very costly effort.

A legislative mandate from Topeka is not necessary for the City to operate transparently or efficiently. Rather, we do this because we are responsive to our residents. Senate Bill 294, if passed, will not change our transparency, or our emphasis on public safety, or our efficient operating practices. However, the bill will create an expenditure reporting requirement — money the City believes would be better directed towards services our residents actually want.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration of this issue. Please contact us if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brandon J. Whipple', written in a cursive style.

Brandon J. Whipple  
Mayor, City of Wichita