



March 7, 2022

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 541 Senate Judiciary Committee

Chair Warren & Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

The Northeast Johnson County cities of Merriam, Mission, Prairie Village, and Westwood Hills oppose SB 541. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to SB 541, which we believe directly challenges our cities' home rule authority and challenges the ability of locally elected officials in making public health decisions and responding to not only public health emergencies, but emergencies of any kind.

Locally elected officials are best equipped with the knowledge to respond to issues in their local communities. That has never been more evident than during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it became clear that communities across Kansas had to rely on their own individual strengths, weaknesses, and needs in evaluating and implementing appropriate responses to keep their citizens and communities safe. Our cities, for example, instituted certain measures during the pandemic that we believed were in the best interest of community and public health. Our communities supported our locally determined policies. SB 541 would hinder our cities' ability to respond to these types of situations in the future as we work thoughtfully and diligently to meet the needs of the citizens and businesses we serve.

In addition to our opposition of the erosion of local control promoted in this bill, the provisions authorizing reimbursement of property taxes levied upon businesses shut down or restricted because of certain actions are of particular concern to local governments. We believe this could be a punitive policy, likely leading to abuse and unintended consequences for cities who are simply taking action to protect their citizens in emergency, and continually evolving situations.

We request the committee continue to allow locally elected officials to govern their communities. Thank you for your consideration and we welcome any questions or further discussion you may have on this matter.

Stuart J. Little, Ph.D.
Little Government Relations
stuartjlittle@mac.com