



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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February 16, 2021

Carolyn McGinn, Chair
Senate Local Government Committee
State Capitol, Room 142-S
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: Written Testimony in Support of SCR 1606
John Ford, Riley County Commission Chairman

Dear Chair McGinn and Members of the Committee:

The Board of Riley County Commissioners has introduced SCR 1606.

The goal of SCR 1606 is to provide constitutional protection to the home rule authority all Kansas counties currently have. This is, first, a matter of simple fairness to county commissions across Kansas. Home rule is the authority to legislate locally. Counties use their legislative authority every day to address local demands for service quickly and efficiently. That happens whenever county roads and bridges must be constructed or maintained; when ambulance service is provided; when the county health department distributes COVID-19 vaccine; when emergency management takes action to protect life and property during a flood or tornado; when volunteer firefighters respond to a call. But unlike cities, county authority to make legislative decisions about providing and funding these critical local services is not protected by our Kansas constitution. That is unfair.

Without constitutional protection of county home rule, it can end during any legislative session by repeal of the county home rule statute. In contrast, city home rule cannot end without a constitutional amendment. But the current constitutional protection of city home rule does not grant cities unlimited legislative authority. Cities remain subject to all state law which applies uniformly throughout Kansas. And SCR 1606 reads identically to the constitutional grant of home rule authority given cities. So passage of SCR 1606 does not expand the legislative authority of counties. Counties, like cities, would remain subject to all uniform state laws passed by the legislature.

Riley County trusts the voters of Kansas will, if given the opportunity, grant counties the same constitutional protection of local legislative authority which cities now have. We encourage this committee to give Kansas voters that opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Ford", is written over a horizontal line.

John Ford, Chairman
Board of Riley County Commissioners