



HOUSE BILL

SB 421 - 2024

Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee AN ACT concerning sales taxation; relating to exemptions; providing a sales tax exemption for exploration place, inc.; amending K.S.A. 2023 Supp. 79-3606 and repealing the existing section.

Hearing: Thursday, February 8, 2024, 9:30 AM, Room 548-S

Speaker: Adam Smith, President & Chief Executive Officer, Exploration Place, Wichita, KS

WRITTEN TESTIMONY:

Good morning.

My name is Adam Smith, and I serve as the President and CEO of Exploration Place, located in Wichita, Kansas. Thank you for this opportunity to present some brief information about our organization, and how the Bill you are considering will help bring our transformative Destination Playscape project to life.

Opened in April 2000, our educational mission is "to inspire a deeper interest in science and technology through creative and fun experiences for all." In 2023, Exploration Place was visited by 403,000 individuals, our highest ever total, making us the second largest tourist attraction in the state. Additionally, our extensive STEM education outreach programs, including travel camps and summer library programs, reached over 40,000 students in more than seventy of the 105 counties in the state of Kansas.

The Destination Playscape project is a visionary endeavor to take Exploration Place to the next level of success. Over three phases, this ambitious project includes the construction of a riverfront amphitheater, a world class six-acre destination playscape, and significant indoor renovations. It's designed not only to grow our visitor numbers beyond the 1 million mark annually, but also to significantly enhance Wichita's status as a competitive regional destination, rivalling cities like Oklahoma City, Kansas City, Tulsa, Omaha, Denver, and Dallas.

The project has gained significant momentum and support from all corners of the Wichita community and our capital fundraising campaign is currently at \$18.2 million of the expected \$25 million cost. Studies have shown that the project should triple the economic impact of Exploration Place from \$21 million to over \$66.7 million annually. It will not only elevate our community's quality of life but also serve as a beacon for tourism, education, and economic development along the Arkansas River corridor.

The passage of this Bill will eliminate a significant bureaucratic overhead that currently burdens the project. Without a Project Exemption Certificate, Exploration Place will be forced into a cumbersome process where we must directly procure all materials for our project using our sales tax exemption, and then supply them to our contractors and subcontractors. This not only slows down the project but also places an undue administrative load on our team, diverting resources from our core mission.

Furthermore, this burden of red tape is not shared by most other public benefit organizations in Kansas. We are simply asking that Exploration Place be given equal footing with zoos, churches, schools, hospitals and daycare centers.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the significant benefits this Bill would bring—not just to Exploration Place, but to our community, our state, and the broader region.