



February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## Written Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 474 Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee

Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee.

The Northeast Johnson County cities of Prairie Village, Mission, Merriam, Roeland Park, and Westwood Hills oppose Senate Bill 474. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 474, which we believe directly challenges local government home rule authority of our locally elected officials and weakens the processes for governing body decision making that may not be in the best interest of our community.

Kansas cities and the State of Kansas have entrusted voters in elections to select representatives to govern, set policy, determine taxes and budgets in a timely manner, and eventually require each representative, if they so choose, to secure the support of the public in the next election.

Petition or initiative efforts such as those envisioned by Senate Bill 474 diminish the electoral process wherein campaigning and the open exchange of political debate shapes the electors' choices. Senate Bill 474 sidesteps the electoral process to change administrative ordinances by requiring petition signatures by only 25 percent of the electors in the last election. If 25 or 40 percent of those electors sign the petition depending on the size of the city, the elected governing body must comply or put the issue on a special election ballot.

The State of Kansas and her cities have wisely relied on elections to guide political decision making rather than an initiative process with a low bar to force ballot questions whether from a vocal minority or well-funded special interest. Their influence may be exaggerated even more in local special elections with low voter engagement. We have seen how that process works, or does not work, in other states. In Kansas the ballot box and the process of campaigns and public debate guide policy.

Our citizens are best served when our locally elected officials have the freedom to conduct the business of their jurisdiction with views that best reflect the needs and desires of their constituents. Elections are the means to demonstrate support or disapproval of those who won the previous election. A ballot initiative with a very low threshold and the possibility of a very small minority determining policy that cannot be changed for ten years is contrary to our state's long-standing tradition.

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](mailto:stuartjlittle@mac.com)