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March 19, 2024

Chairman Billinger and Members of the Committee –

I'm here today in support of SB 542 to support infrastructure investments for addressing homelessness by local governments. For the City of Liberal, access to these dollars will enable the City to address immediate needs at their long-term shelter for a much-needed kitchen expansion, and roofing and HVAC repairs.

There are few long-term shelters in the southwest Kansas region; Liberal's shelter provides housing for up to 90 days. During that time, case managers provide support services to individuals, aiding in connecting to therapeutic treatments, job training and placement, assistance with benefits, medical issues/referrals, etc. Clients cannot be actively using drugs/alcohol to receive housing services. Their clients must also actively seek employment.

The shelter is staffed 24/7 and can house up to 40 people (including family living quarters). However, budget constraints have resulted in capping new admits at 20 people.

Additionally, the shelter provides daily meals to those without adequate food access.

The availability for the city to access these funds – estimates suggest about \$500,000 – would ensure the ability to support the homeless population more adequately in Southwest Kansas.

That said, as a smaller municipality that recognizes the demand for these dollars, we urge you to consider language that assures smaller communities are a priority. Our ability to aid the homeless in our small communities means they're less likely to migrate to larger communities for services. As such, we'd offer language to stipulate that counties with fewer than 40,000 residents are eligible for a percentage of the funding so that it's not all allocated to metropolitan areas with larger homelessness issues. Further, for smaller communities, including language that permits in-kind funding and philanthropic support as permissible for match funding.

In working this bill, it would also help for "wraparound services" to be defined or provide reference to an established standard. We also find the language between lines 8 & 9 makes it unclear whether failure to provide wraparound services (ex. community soup kitchen) for any period of time in the future constitutes failure to use funds as awarded.

We look forward to working with you to advance this legislation and ensure it encapsulates the needs of our smaller communities. Addressing homelessness is a multi-faceted, challenging endeavor. We appreciate the state's willingness to work as partners so we can provide the infrastructure needed to support the efforts currently underway.

Very Respectfully,

Jessica Lucas