



WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY

**Testimony of Larry Jones, Finney County Commissioner
Before the Senate Taxation Committee
In Support of Senate Bill No. 167
March 16, 2017**

Member Counties

Barber

Barton

Clark

Ellis

Finney

Ford

Gove

Grant

Gray

Hamilton

Harper

Haskell

Hodgeman

Kearny

Kiowa

Lane

Logan

Meade

Morton

Ness

Norton

Rawlins

Rice

Russell

Rush

Scott

Seward

Sheridan

Sherman

Stanton

Stevens

Thomas

Trego

Wallace

Wichita

Chairwoman Tyson and Members of the Senate Taxation Committee:

Established in 1980, Kansas Legislative Policy Group (KLPG) is a non-partisan organization comprised of elected county commissioners representing the collective interests of 35 rural Kansas counties. Thank you for allowing KLPG to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 167, which removes a requirement restricting the amount of property tax revenue a county can collect from year to year through a formula based on the inflation rate or by holding a vote of the people.

Property taxes are a county's primary source of revenue to fund essential county services – law enforcement, fire, emergency medical services, E-911, county health departments, hospitals, libraries, roadways, schools, salaries of county employees and other necessary services – that benefit all citizens. Most people (county commissioners included) would prefer not paying taxes whether they are federal, state or local. Although unpopular, taxes are a necessity. If the tax is fair, equitable and necessary to provide important government services, generally the assessment is palatable to the taxpayer.

Rural counties have very limited financial resources and our tax base continues to diminish. For our member counties sales tax revenues are down and the Legislature is looking at measures to accelerate that decline. State mandated property tax exemptions continue to negatively impact counties tax base. More responsibility is placed on counties to provide services and administer programs that previously were funded by state. Counties provide needed services when no other governmental entity is able to or willing. Each and every county in Kansas has different demands and needs and a "one size - fix all" approach doesn't work in widely divergent communities 350 miles apart from each other.

County Commissioners take their elected roles seriously and develop sustainable budgets to fund efficient county operations and strive to provide the best service possible with limited financial resources. This is a challenging task. During the budget process there are extensive opportunities for public participation and public input. Our commissioners regularly make budget cuts and adjustments to balance county expenditures within projected revenues, but we need flexibility.

In a small community – we are all neighbors, co-workers, go to the same church and attend school events together. Regularly we see and visit with one another. When a taxpayer is displeased with the direction or action of their local governing body, I assure you we quickly become aware and respond to the best of our ability.

Senate Bill No. 167 is a positive step in the proper direction and permits county officials to do the jobs they were elected to do and allows local governments crucial management flexibility, without disproportionately affecting rural communities because of our unpredictable economy.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to present written testimony to the Committee. I urge you to support Senate Bill No. 167.

Larry Jones
President
Kansas Legislative Policy Group