



COWLEY COLLEGE

Date: February 1, 2017
To: Members of the Senate Education Committee
From: Dennis C. Rittle, Cowley College President
Re: Support of SB 75

The journey of establishing a college campus in the heart of Sumner County to address the needs of students, businesses, industries, and the overall local economies began in July of 2015 when I met with the Executive Director of the Wellington Chamber of Commerce. Over the course of the next 12 months, additional conversations and meetings occurred across Sumner County with school officials, counselors, teachers, business owners, industry professionals, local dignitaries, community members, and students. A resounding message emerged, the citizens wanted a campus strategically located in Sumner County to address educational and workforce needs.

During those same 12 months, the College engaged in a rigorous data collection campaign by gathering responses from approximately 1,000 individuals across Sumner County, some through surveys and some through focus group interviews. High School students from across Sumner County were surveyed regarding their program areas of interest, while industry leaders were solicited for employment needs. The College also worked very closely with the Director of Sumner County Economic Development to gain perspective regarding how this project could drive workforce development and economic prosperity for Sumner County and the greater South Central Kansas region.

In the winter of 2015 and twice in 2016, I spoke with the Sumner County Commissioners regarding the best approach to identify a reliable, yet sensible, funding stream to support the construction and operation of this new campus, which would be built in Wellington. The decision to employ a sales tax to fund the projected was agreed upon because it would allow the entire County to be financially involved in the support of this project but also provide an opportunity for citizens outside of the County to contribute to this project by spending dollars when using goods and services within the County.

In August of 2016, the Sumner County Commissioners approved the College to place on the November Ballot a question to permit a half-cent sales tax for the construction and operation of a Cowley College campus in Sumner County. A campaign ensued, and like all activities in which taxpayers are asked to contribute additional dollars for a project, trust needed to be built as it

serves as the currency of voter support. The challenge of the campaign was not voters seeing tremendous value in acquiring a college campus in Wellington; rather, the challenge was, can the voters trust Cowley College to be faithful on its promises to build a campus and provide the key programs of study?

During the same timeframe, the College Board of Trustees was excited about this potential partnership and wrestled with the notion of how to ensure the residents of Sumner County could be rightfully represented in high-level decision making at the College should the sales tax pass. A number of possible representative vehicles were discussed such as an advisory committee; however, all such measures did not have the same clout and efficacious impact as having a Board of Trustee from Sumner County join the Cowley College Board of Trustees. Thus, following an historic favorable vote in November, the College embarked on a journey to develop a sensible and reasonable manner which would permit representation when taxation is involved. This effort has led to the proposed legislation before you today.

I have shared this proposed legislation with the Cowley College Board of Trustees, local legislators, community college presidents, and the representatives of the Kansas Association of Community College Trustees. Each group has indicated either support or no concerns of this proposed legislation.

On behalf of Chair Robert (Bob) Juden and the Cowley College Board of Trustees, we respectfully seek your approval to pass this proposed legislation favorably out of committee.



COWLEY COLLEGE

Date: February 1, 2017
To: Members of the Senate Education Committee
From: Jessica Lucas, Cowley College Government Liaison
Re: Support of SB 75

This past fall, I led the campaign to construct a Cowley College full-service campus in Sumner County. Voters were asked to support a half-cent sales tax increase to fund the campus development. We're here today because the majority of Sumner County residents saw the value in a college campus that would offer manufacturing technology, agricultural studies, information technology, education, public safety, and other career training opportunities in the Wellington area.

The measure passed with 56 percent voter approval and was promptly followed by a donation of 18-acres of land for the campus construction. There's a renewed energy in the community because of this effort and economic development opportunities are springing forward that are only possible because of the College's intent to locate there.

Today we're focused on construction and getting the doors opened for classes in the Fall of 2018, but it was never a sure thing that voters were going to approve the sales tax to build the campus.

As the manager of the campaign, I was peppered with questions on a daily basis for sixty days before the election. We were able to provide satisfactory answers for all of those questions, except for one.

I cringed when people would ask me – "Okay, we're going to invest our sales tax dollars in this campus, but will we have a seat on the board? How do we know Cowley College is going to have our interests in mind if the Board is only from Cowley County?"

I didn't cringe because they were asking for something Cowley College wasn't willing to provide, I cringed because it was the one thing I couldn't satisfactorily answer prior to the vote.

Because of current state law, there is no opportunity for Sumner County residents to have a seat on the board, even though beginning in April, their tax dollars will fund a Cowley College campus in their community. It's a taxpayer without representation scenario.

We were very forthright when the question was asked about representation. The answer was always that the Board of Trustees intended to be inclusive of Sumner County's need and perspectives, but the law didn't allow an elected trustee position from the county.

True to the word of Dr. Rittle and the College Board of Trustees, we do want to ensure that Sumner County residents have an elected voice at the table and that's why we're here today asking for your help.

The bill before you allows for the election of a trustee from Sumner County and assures taxpayers have a representative voice from the taxing area.

We hope you will recognize its merit and pass it favorably out of committee.