

STATE OF KANSAS



Senator Elaine Bowers

DISTRICT 36

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ORAL, IN-PERSON TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB479

SENATE FEDERAL AND STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

MARCH 1, 2022

Members of Senate Federal and State Affairs

Thank you for this time to testify in support of SB479 – authorizing a permanent memorial for the Kansas suffragist movement on the Capitol grounds. The same language as this Senate bill has been introduced in the Kansas House of Representatives – HB2661.

This bill originated from the fall meeting of the Capitol Preservation Committee. The Capitol Preservation Committee was established by the Kansas Legislature (75-2269) and is charged with reviewing proposals “for renovation of all areas of the state capitol, the capitol’s visitor center and the grounds surrounding the state capitol to ensure that the historical beauty of the areas are preserved. The statute further states, “Any permanent displays or monuments proposed to be located on the state capitol grounds must be approved by the committee and authorized by the passage of a bill of the state legislature.” The President Eisenhower statue is an example of a recent bill from the committee as well as this year’s SB330 Gold Star Families.

Suffragist Memorial in the Capitol

At the October 12, 2021, meeting of the Capitol Preservation Committee, the Kansas League of Women Voters and the Association of University Women of Kansas proposed a memorial in the Capitol to Kansas women who fought for the right to vote in Kansas. Funds would be raised privately for the memorial. The concept of the proposal was approved by the committee. If the Legislature approves the memorial through legislation, then the sponsors will work with the Capitol Preservation Committee to approve appropriate plans.

Short History of Suffrage in Kansas

Clarina Nichols was but one leader in the women's rights movement in Kansas. Nichols would play an important role in both the anti-slavery movement and women’s rights. At the Kansas Constitutional Convention July 5, 1859, held in Wyandotte, Nichols presented a petition calling for equal political and civil rights for Kansas women. With the adoption of the Wyandotte Constitution, women were allowed to participate in school district elections and to own property. The constitution stated that the legislature was to "provide for their equal rights in the possession of their children." By 1887 Kansas women gained the right to vote in municipal elections. In 1912, eight years before the ratification of the national woman suffrage amendment, Kansas became the eighth state to extend full equal voting rights to women. Many Kansas women and men worked hard to ensure the vote for Kansas women.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elaine Bowers".

Senator Elaine Bowers