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COMMITTEES:
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Education
Taxation

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Testimony in favor of HB 2067: Live Streaming Audio and Video of Committee Proceedings

Dear Chairman Barker, Vice-Chairman Awerkamp, Ranking Minority Member Ruiz, and members of the Federal and State Affairs Committee:

I stand before the committee to testify in favor of HB 2067. When I first began in the legislature, we only had audio-streams from the main chambers, and no audio streaming in any of our committee rooms. During testimony for the Transparency Act in 2014, skepticism was expressed by legislators as to the usefulness of this live-stream service to the citizens we serve. The question posed most often was "Will anyone even listen?"

Five years later, that question has been answered. People are most certainly listening in to our proceedings. The House and Senate YouTube streams are averaging 215 views per day this year, spiking to over 3,300 views on one day. This plays an important role in constituent outreach. Audio in the committee is a great start, but voices are hard to identify, pictures are worth a thousand words. Lobbyists are in the building and listening every day, witnessing meetings live. Why should voters from Abilene, Atchison, Columbus, Derby, Fort Scott, Great Bend, McPherson, Mulvane, and Wichita be forced to drive hundreds of miles to witness the same as paid lobbyists? If we as legislators are proud of our voting records, what incentive is there to hide from the voters?

Another question that was asked was "will this cause legislators to grandstand?" While I cannot provide any hard evidence in this regard, I think that we have not seen any evidence of an increase in bombastic speeches...though neither has there been any decrease.

Why the pursuit of video as well as audio? Many citizens are unable to take time out of their days to listen in to proceedings, uninterrupted. We have seen that the way that most of us view videos through social media that captioned videos are the wave of the future. This is especially important given accessibility to disabled voters: our deaf citizens are currently locked out of this, which is just wrong. This works for everyone to gain insight into the legislative process.

Video increases transparency. While many of my colleagues may disagree, I think that the visual story tells the entire story, most notably, that livestreaming video gives our constituents a way to see our votes, as our committee division votes are taken by a show of hands. If you believe that all votes should be recorded, this is a way to increase that transparency for our citizens. If you do not stand behind all your votes, you may not choose to support this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.