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Written Testimony in Opposition to HB 2421
House Taxation Committee, Rep. Adam Smith, Chair
March 17, 2021

Rep. Smith, Ranking Member Gartner, members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony this morning. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I am executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” by educating, engaging and advocating on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical social, economic and climate justice issues. I write today in opposition to HB 2421.

The first and most important role of state government is to ensure that our people have what they need to survive and thrive. This includes fully funded public schools, a functioning social safety net without onerous wait lists, developing capacity to respond to disasters, upgraded IT for our departments, a competent and capable Department of Children and Families to protect our most vulnerable citizens, to name just a few. These are not optional, they are requirements -- the absolute least that the state must do – a sacred trust between our residents and our government.

It was only 9 years ago that Kansas embarked on an ill-considered and unwise course of income tax cuts. The damage that “experiment” caused – to our public education system, to the functioning of our state government, to the health and well-being of our residents – was profound, and we are in many ways still digging out of it. We have spent the past year in pandemic and recession, challenging our government and our people in unprecedented ways. The last thing we need right now is another round of tax cuts that will primarily benefit multinational corporations and the wealthiest among us and put our state further behind in preparedness and in caring for our neighbors.

One of the most readily achievable ways for this legislature to help Kansans would be to expand Medicaid. We often hear from opponents that the state can’t afford its 10% share of Expansion, but such considerations never seem to come into play when it’s time for another round of tax cuts.

If the legislature wants to address our unfair tax system, there are plenty of ways do so: ease the second highest food sales tax in the US through a refundable tax credit; support working families by expanding the earned income tax credit to all tax filers; lower Kansas’ reliance on fees and fines; implement paid medical and family leave; raise the minimum wage. These are all ways to help working Kansans and the poor and to spread our collective tax responsibility more fairly.

This legislature’s first priority should be guaranteeing the functioning of state government and the well-being of our citizens -- fixing broken departments, funding necessary services, and caring for our neighbors. Let’s look out for the least among us, for a change. Maybe after that, we can give tax relief to our most blessed. Please vote against HB 2421.