



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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February 23, 2021

Carolyn McGinn, Chair
Senate Local Government Committee
State Capitol, Room 142-S
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: Written Testimony in Support of SCR 1606
Kathryn Focke, Riley County Commissioner

Dear Chair McGinn and Members of the Committee:

The Riley County Commission unanimously believes county home rule deserves constitutional protection.

The governing body closest to local issues is uniquely suited to respond immediately, creatively and effectively to citizens. The ongoing pandemic and the local public health response to it, provide excellent examples.

When some local businesses told this Board they believed our Board of Health and Local Health Officer COVID-19 restrictions were too strict, the Riley County Commission took action. Now a formalized advisory group made up of business representatives provides input for consideration by our Local Health Officer. This benefits both business and public health.

When the state of Kansas passed along CARES funding to Riley County, with a mandate to fairly address local COVID-19 needs, the Riley County Commission was not overwhelmed by the task. Instead, the County quickly created a staff committee to develop fair grant application standards and to review the requests from small businesses for COVID-19 assistance. Thereafter, the County Commissioners authorized distribution of grants to small businesses totaling \$2,589,055.24. Those grants provided essential assistance to 186 struggling local small businesses.

Without the local authority of home rule, the Riley County Commission would not have been able to take either of the foregoing actions without first obtaining legislative approval. That would have slowed local response in both of the above situations. That kind of delay would have reduced this County's ability to quickly meet the critical local needs of its citizens.

This kind of local authority deserves constitutional protection—the identical constitutional protection Kansas cities already have for their home rule authority.

Sincerely,


Kathryn Focke
Riley County Commissioner