



Testimony

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Public Building Commissions HB 2296

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House Local Government Committee

The Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City opposes House Bill 2296. Imposing a requirement that every County project funded through a Public Building Commission be submitted first to a vote is expensive, ineffective and unnecessary.

County governments have only limited options for financing public building improvements without an election, under Kansas statute. KSA 19-15, 114-116 allows for the issuance of up to \$300,000 in general obligation bonds without an election. This limit may be sufficient for a small rural County, but the facility improvement needs for a large urban County are significantly greater.

It is critical for the Unified Government to have the ability to finance public building improvements, especially to address health and safety concerns and maintain public buildings. In 2013, the Unified Government Public Building Commission issued debt for a \$10-million upgrade to the community's emergency communication facilities and radio system. The need for this upgrade was critical and on a timeframe that may not have been met had an election had to be held first. And, if voters had rejected the measure, Police, Fire, EMS and Emergency Management would have lost the ability to communicate with each other and with other KC metro agencies. That would have been a disastrous end that would have killed people.

The Unified Government's adopted 2014-2019 capital improvement plan identifies over \$18-million in needed County building improvement projects. Once these future projects are prioritized, the Unified Government Commission will consider funding these improvements using Public Building Commission authority.

The Unified Government recognizes the importance of citizen input. The governing body is selected by the election process. The Public Building Commission for the Unified Government includes the Mayor, the Economic Development and Finance Committee Chair, the County Administrator, the Chief Financial Officer, and Chief Legal Counsel. The elected Commission must approve any action brought forth by the PBC Board.

A primary responsibility of the elected body is to prepare the annual operating budget and capital improvement plan. Preparation of the budget and capital improvement plan involves extensive public input. Also current law allows for a protest petition with a mere 5% of voters having to sign to force an election. If a particular project is controversial, the public already has a means to bring the issue to a vote.

House Bill 2296 will damage the ability of elected leaders to take care of the community they were elected to lead. It is unneeded.