

Statement for the Senate Judiciary Committee

by the

Kansas League of Women Voters,

*in support of Senate Bill No. 360
Amending the Kansas Open Meetings Act*

February 2, 2016

Chairman King, Vice-Chair Smith, Ranking Member Haley and Members of the Committee:

I am Cille King, Voter Service Chair of the Kansas League of Women Voters. Thank you for this opportunity to comment on Senate Bill No. 360, amending the *Kansas Open Meetings Act*.

From its earliest days, and for almost 100 years, the League of Women Voters has been concerned that government serve the people. The League is dedicated to ensuring that all eligible voters have both the opportunity and the information to exercise their right to vote. Indeed, voting is the core of our democracy. But a vote is of little use unless the voter has the information he or she needs make intelligent choices.

In his excellent study of the 10 largest cities and the 10 largest counties in Kansas, Dr. Cowles has shown very clearly that almost all of the governmental bodies of the largest cities and counties of Kansas conduct some of their business without disclosing *any* meaningful information about the subjects and issues they were to discuss. During 2014, these governmental bodies conducted at least 200 hours of governmental business in complete secrecy. In fact, 88% of closed sessions were conducted without giving the public *any* meaningful information about the subjects and issues they were to discuss.

While the great majority of city and county governments were conducting business in secrecy, the Manhattan City Commission showed that it didn't have to conduct *any* governmental business in secrecy. The City of Manhattan hasn't suffered in the process.

We believe that elected officials should always remember that they are, at all times, responsible to the citizens of Kansas. When elected officials know that their actions are being observed by the public, they are more likely to do their best to govern responsibly. And when they don't, citizens can respond as needed.

Friends, open government is NOT a partisan matter. When government is closed, beyond the justifications stated in the revised *Open Meetings Act*, ALL citizens are denied their right to know and respond appropriately to the actions of their elected officials.

We therefor ask you to support the passage of Senate Bill 360, amending the Kansas *Open Meetings Act*.

Thank you.