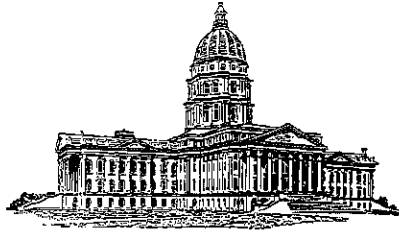


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JOHN R. EPLEE, MD
63RD DISTRICT

March 21, 2019

Testimony before Senate Ethics, Elections, and Local Government

Chairwoman: Senator Elaine Bowers

Vice-Chair: Senator Randy Hardy

Ranking Minority: Senator David Haley

Bill Passed House of Representatives: 125-0 3/19/19

Madame Chair and members of the committee. I want to thank you for allowing me to appear before you today to present support for HB2188. This is a very straight forward bill that passed out The House Committee as a whole, on 3/19/19 --125-0.

This is a bill that promotes what good policy should be about- less government. This is a simple governance bill that absorbs one unit of government into another unit. It makes government more efficient, i.e. "less is more." The White Clay Creek watershed district no.26 came into existence after the catastrophic floods in Atchison, Ks in 1958 & 1959. This is kind of what we are experiencing in my community at this time, only with far less dire results because of the 29 Watershed dams constructed in the early 60s to prevent subsequent flooding like currently. Were it not for the watershed dams constructed at that time the current flood would be catastrophic to my community.

Over time the City of Atchison has taken over physical ownership of all 29 dams formerly owned by the Watershed authority. And the City does it best to maintain and monitor all those dams and their ponds. A couple of the ponds are stocked with trout. They are great fun to catch.

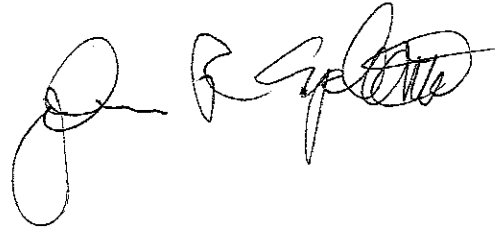
For many years the Watershed Authority #26 has not really functioned as they should. And while they have full levying authority up to 2.86 mills in Atchison County, they cannot fill out their 5 member board when they are supposed to meet, they often don't have a quorum. They are unable to exercise their taxing authority of 2.86 mills. The city must then republish the quarterly meeting and hope they get enough members present. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. This is so costly and inefficient.

I have spoken to the Watershed Authority Chairman and he is OK being absorbed into the City of Atchison at this time. This will save money to the taxpayers of the county as that mill level will move solely to the residents of the City of Atchison. This will save county taxpayer a bit of money.

Admittedly this board struggles to fill board vacancies. The property tax burden will shift. Currently 85% of the property of dams are within the city limits, 15% outside. With dissolution of the watershed board, 100% of the property taxes will be funded inside the city limits. This will be a small reduction in property tax on the county residents.

This combination (dissolution) reduces the number of government entities and makes us more efficient. This not an attempt to raise taxes. There was a companion bill in tax that addresses the taxation issues and explains that the mill levy of this combined entity cannot exceed the total of the 2 separate entities added up. So, no tax increase. And no veiled attempt to annex more (and or move the City Limits. There are no other watershed issues going forward for these 2 entities. Atchison City is the only town in Kansas that owns 29 watershed dams. Both parties- the Watershed Authority and the City of Atchison are very receptive to this bill when it takes effect. The County of Atchison has no "push back" on this bill as it really has no effect on them. There is precedent on this bill from last session with The City of Pratt and the Pratt Airport Authority, which has been signed into law.

Thank you, Madame Chair & Members of the Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be a cursive name, possibly "J. R. [unclear]".