

March 11, 2022

Dear Chairperson Smith and Members of the House Taxation Committee:

Please accept this written testimony as support of HB 2732. My name is Brendan Wiley. I serve as the CEO of Friends of the Topeka Zoo (FOTZ) which operates under the DBA, Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center located in Gage Park in the Southwest corner of Topeka.

Gage Park has a vibrant history dating back to 1907. Since its inception, it has been a destination committed to improving quality of life for the community it serves. With its wide range of amenities, it is one of the best family-oriented parks in the country. While it was originally established through a deed from the Gage family, for the people of Topeka, today it serves a community that includes a radius of sixty to eighty miles around Shawnee County.

Since its beginning, Gage Park has received support through public funding. Roughly ten years ago, stakeholders of the park began questioning whether the model that was established a century ago was still the right model for the future of the park.

Today, Gage Park operates through a collaboration of County and non-profit operators. Capital investments into the park are made by both public and private initiatives. Gage Park is critical to the quality of life for Topeka, Shawnee County and all who visit here. As such, the future success of Gage Park is critical to our community.

Specific to the zoo, 2022 will see approximately 305,000 zoo visitors. The Topeka Zoo is the highest attended attraction in Northeast Kansas outside of the Kansas City Metropolitan Area. 164,000 (54%) of the visitors to the zoo will come from outside of Shawnee County. Over the next 8 years, the cumulative economic impact of the Topeka Zoo will be more than \$105 million. Over that same 8-year period the Topeka Zoo will experience almost 1.5 million out of county visitors who will spend over \$18 million in our local restaurants. It's data points like that which have raised the question, should the public support that flows to Gage Park continue to be through property tax?

HB 2732 doesn't make you answer that question. Your support of HB 2732 simply allows the local electors in Shawnee County to answer it themselves. HB 2732 will allow the local community to be engaged in the future of Gage Park. HB 2732 will allow local voters to decide if the model that has provided public support for the past 100 years is the right model or if it is time to change the model to allow all users of the park that spend sales tax locally to contribute to its funding thereby shifting the burden away from local property taxpayers.

Through this testimony, I ask you to join Friends of the Topeka Zoo in support of HB 2732 Gage Park Improvement Authority.

Sincerely,



Brendan Wiley
CEO, Friends of the Topeka Zoo
Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center