

January 22, 2024

To: House Federal and State Affairs Committee

Re: House Bill No. 2208

My name is Karen L. Johnson. I reside at 4950 Adams Street, Westwood, KS

I am opposed to the conveyance of title to the Shawnee Indian Mission to the Shawnee Tribe. I have lived in Westwood, Kansas for almost 58 years. Westwood's neighbor to the south and west is Fairway, Kansas, where the Mission is located. I live within walking distance of the Mission and have visited the Mission on many occasions to enjoy the green space that surrounds the three historic buildings, take out-of-town visitors, and attend the festivals. It is a special place.

The Mission has historic significance for all of us—native Americans and those of us who arrived later. It is a Kansas State Historic Site and the only National Historic Landmark in Johnson County. In the early 1840s the Mission was founded by Rev. Thomas Johnson, a Methodist minister and the namesake of our county. There, native children from not just the Shawnee Tribe, but those from 21 other tribes were sent to school to learn English, manual arts and agriculture. The story is an important part of the history of the way native tribes and their children were treated.

The history of Kansas is also anchored to this group of buildings for it was in the North building that the pre-statehood legislature met and passed laws, and one of our governors had his office there, making it the capitol of Kansas for a brief time. And the trails west went past the Mission. In short, the Mission oozes history.

Although history is a major reason to oppose this bill, another is the concern for the future of this land. The Mission attracts visitors and can be used for community events. The historical exhibits have been modernized to tell the story of the children who were sent there to learn. There is nothing to guarantee that such visitations could continue. The Mission is a community asset, and the community should remain its caretaker. Once title to this land is conveyed to another party, there is no guarantee it will remain the historic complex that it is today. The Mission sits in the middle of a residential area, near a church and school. Any commercialization of the area would be devastating to the community.

I ask that you vote no on Bill Number 2208.

*Karen L. Johnson*