

January 22, 2024

Dear members of the Federal and State Affairs Committee of the Kansas House of Representatives,

I write to you as a concerned resident of Kansas who cares deeply about our state's rich history. I am writing to express my strong opposition to **HR 2208** and articulate why this bill represents profoundly flawed policy that could impact our state for generations to come.

The Shawnee Indian Mission holds immense historical significance to Kansas as a National Historic Landmark and State Historic Site. It is widely viewed as our state's most foundational historic site. The Kansas Territorial Governor, Andrew Reeder, had his offices in the Mission's North Building. The first Kansas Statehood vote took place in the chapel in the Mission's East Building. It housed events that were central to the Bleeding Kansas period and the Civil War. It was a stopping point on all 3 Trails West. Given its unparalleled and irreplicable historical significance, the question arises: Is it appropriate to transfer ownership of our most historic site to out of state hands?

Regrettably, HR 2208, rather than fostering cohesion and cooperation, invites a storm of controversy and potential claims of land conveyance by various stakeholders. Here are some critical perspectives on this matter.

- **The Mission's significance transcends any one group.** Diverse communities, including the Hopewell tribe and later the Kansa (Kaw Tribe), who lend our state its name, have historical connections to this land. If the state begins conveying land upon request, it opens the door to other tribes asserting their claims. It is crucial to note that the Kaw nation opposes HR 2208.
- **The Shawnee Indian Mission's history is intricate and multifaceted, involving many tribes during its existence as a school.** The school period predates the State of Kansas and was about 23 years of the site's more than 180-year history. It was originally established at the request of the newly arrived Shawnee tribe, but it included students from 22 other tribes. The State later paid the Shawnee for the land. To fully respect, study, and understand the site's cultural diversity, it should not be exclusively owned by a single tribe or other group. Opposing this bill is the best way to support our tribes and First Nations peoples.
- **Today the Mission is an integral part of the community and historical education for all Kansans and peoples with a connection to the site.** It sits in the heart of a residential neighborhood in the middle of the Kansas City metro area and abuts two schools and a church. More than 10,000 people visit each year. Preserving it as a public space for education, history and community use is essential.
- **Conveying the Mission to a sovereign nation such as the Shawnee raises concerns about whether all the stories will be told authentically and whether the historic site will be adequately preserved.** Such a transfer would result in loss of the Mission's National Historic Landmark designation and would place its future in jeopardy.

As a lifelong Kansan who cares about our history, I do not want the most historic site in Kansas given away. We believe that continued public ownership gives voice to all people from the past and future. **No one entity, not a tribe or any other organization, should be given the responsibility for the Mission's current and future benefit to the citizens of Kansas and our nation.** It should remain publicly held. Please oppose the advancement of this bill out of your committee.

Respectfully,

Merritt Sloan McShane, Prairie Village, KS