

**Testimony by Dennis Kriesel with the Johnson County Department of
Health & Environment (JCDHE) to
House Committee on Judiciary
Verbal Proponent for HB 2754 – February 19, 2024**

Chair Humphries and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you all today in support of House Bill 2754, a bill which would allow counties to use home rule powers to exempt from conducting school sanitary inspections. My name is Dennis Kriesel, and I am the deputy director at JCDHE. JCDHE's mission is to promote and protect the health and environment for all who live, work, and play in Johnson County.

Counties originally had this home rule option, and several counties did exempt themselves from the school sanitary inspection duty listed for the local health officer under K.S.A. 65-202. This option was lost during the 2020 special session when several COVID-19 related changes were made. We are not aware of any concerns that were expressed about exempting from the school inspection part of the statute and our understanding is changes were made regarding other, new provisions and the loss of this option was incidental.

Schools already see a lot of regulatory requirements and inspections, such as from the Kansas Department of Agriculture for food safety. We believe tasking the local health officer with a similar role is duplicative to existing protections while also being vaguely defined for the local health approach (there are no inspection requirements listed in statute and each county must decide how to address the requirement). For the 2021-2022 school year, JCDHE inspected over 200 facilities and saw an average compliance score of 98% or higher on our assessment approach. The most common citations found were extremely minor, like items being locked out of storage or exterior trash containers not being closed during the time of inspection.

The requirement is also costly to taxpayers. For the 2021-2022 school year, JCHDE invested 99 staff hours conducting these inspections and logged over 1,100 miles in the process, all for a redundant exercise that provides no meaningful value for Johnson County students.

In some counties, the school inspection requirement in K.S.A. 65-202 may make sense. We appreciate that HB 2754 preserves this requirement, while allowing counties that know the inspections are being handled via another means can charter out of the requirement per home rule authority. As such, JCDHE asks that the committee recommend HB 2754 favorably for passage.

Thank you for considering and I will stand for questions.

Sincerely,

Dennis Kriesel, Deputy Director
Johnson County Department of Health & Environment

