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Testimony by Jennifer Stewart – Wyandotte County Public Health Department (Environmental) to Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Proponent for HB 2754 – March 15, 2024

Chair Gossage and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support of House Bill 2754, a bill which would allow counties to use home rule powers to exempt from conducting school sanitary inspections. Our mission is to promote and protect the health and environment for all who live, work, and play in Wyandotte County.

Schools already see a lot of regulatory requirements and inspections, from entities such as the Fire Marshal and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. 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. For example: there are no inspection requirements listed in the statute and each county must decide how to address the requirement. For the 2022-2023 school year, the Wyandotte County Public Health Department (WCPHD) inspected 65 facilities with zero major violations. The most common citations found were extremely minor, like maintenance closets being unlocked and exterior trash containers not being closed during the time of inspection.

The local inspection requirement is also costly to taxpayers. For the 2022-2023 school year, WCPHD invested 100 staff hours conducting these inspections and logged over 1,100 miles in the process. It is duplicative of the other agencies that inspect, with no enforcement available for any concerns or violations. All in all, we feel that it provides no meaningful value for Wyandotte County students and takes away the limited number of staff from our other program areas that pose a much higher risk and affects more people such as pool and septic health and safety.

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, the Wyandotte County Public Health Department asks that the committee recommend HB 2754 favorably for passage.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Stewart

Environmental Health Manager

Amanda Harrop

Environmental Inspections Supervisor