Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition

Proponent Testimony: SB 415
Committee on Federal and State Affairs
Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition
Christy McMurphy

Chairperson Warren and Members of this Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. My name is Christy McMurphy, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition (KSHC). We are a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening Kansas's cross-sector homeless response system through advocacy, education, and data-informed solutions, aiming to make homelessness. We are proud to support HB 415.

We are working with all 105 Kansas counties to end homelessness using a proven national model called Built for Zero. A key pillar of the Built for Zero approach is preventing homelessness before it begins, by addressing systemic issues that drive individuals and families into housing instability.

Kansas law already requires landlords to provide safe and habitable housing, but the Kansas Residential Landlord and Tenant Act offer very little enforcement when landlords fail to meet that obligation. Renters generally cannot recover attorney fees, damages are limited, and as a result, legal action is often unrealistic. This has allowed negligent landlords to avoid accountability while renters pay the price.

We have seen the real-world impacts of this gap across Kansas. When properties such as Aspen Place in Gardner, Timberlee in Topeka, and Emery Gardens in Wichita were condemned, renters who had followed the rules were forced to leave their homes with little notice and few legal options. Many lost prepaid rent, personal belongings, and housing stability, placing them at immediate risk of homelessness.

SB 415 provides a practical solution by applying the Kansas Consumer Protection Act when a landlord's action, or inaction, makes a rental unit uninhabitable. This allows renters to recover damages and attorney fees and gives district attorneys and the Attorney General the authority to enforce the law on behalf of tenants.

This bill does not create new requirements for landlords. It simply ensures that existing laws have real consequences. Most importantly, SB 415 helps prevent avoidable displacement and homelessness by holding bad-actor landlords accountable before housing conditions reach a crisis point.

We urge your support of SB 415. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.