

To: Chairman Carpenter, Vice Chairman Kessler and all Committee Members

Re: HB 2208

My name is David O'Connell and I am writing in opposition to the proposed bill that would convey to the Shawnee Tribe all of the rights, title and interest to the land currently occupied and maintained as the Shawnee Indian Mission. I was born in 1956 and spent nearly a quarter century living directly across the intersection from the Mission. Except for a few years away for educational purposes I have always lived within a 5 minute drive.

As a student at the adjacent St. Agnes Grade School I spent the vast majority of my early childhood playing in "the woods"- our designation for the green wooded expanse between the north building of the Mission and Meigs High School. My best friend's back yard on Reinhardt abutted the Mission property. Even as youngsters we somehow knew it was a special place and always treated it with reverence. I don't recall a single episode of leaving trash behind after a picnic or doing anything destructive to the landscape. I do remember catching crawdads in the creek using a foolproof technique we developed- just a stick and a jar, no bait required.

I also remember when there was a dirt path that transformed into an asphalt path that ran along the north side of 53rd St east to St. Agnes. Just east of the north building parking lot the path crossed over the creek. Once when the small "bridge" over the creek fell into disrepair the local Boy Scout troop did a full replacement as a volunteer project- a community project. I still attend events and fairs at the Mission.

These remembrances are but a minor part of the history of this place. There is the grand history of the westward trails and the early days of our great State of Kansas, and certainly an earlier history of the indigenous peoples that the Missions curators are nourishing and hoping to advance, but also the history of the Fairway and Roeland Park communities that surround and cherish the tradition and tranquil aesthetic of the Mission grounds.

I feel that this is the premier historical site in the State of Kansas and, along with the Mid-America All-Indian Museum in Wichita, should be carefully preserved as a valuable resource for generations to come. It does not belong to any one group, jurisdiction or tribe but to all Kansans. For a single tribe out of the many people with a connection to this place to be granted sole ownership with the possibility of future sovereignty risks the demise of one of our most important cultural assets.

In conclusion the question comes down to the future stewardship of the Mission. On one hand is the current structure with ownership by the Kansas State Historical Society with management by the City of Fairway in partnership with the Shawnee Indian Mission Foundation, an arrangement that I feel has and continues to uphold the calling of the Mission very well. On the other hand is ceding control to a single entity, a tribal leader from one of a multitude of tribes who has no more of a legitimate claim than anyone else and whose past activities and current intentions should be in question. I believe that due diligence would persuade everyone that to maintain this public historical cultural gem for future generations to visit, learn from and enjoy, a NO vote on this bill is the only proper course.