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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 care 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, including my own, the Wyandot. 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. **Giving the land to one tribe over the interest of other tribes is erasing and devaluing the history and culture of the other tribes, including mine (Wyandot).** Opposing this bill is the best way to support all Kansas tribes and First Nations peoples.
- **The history of the Mission is COMPLETELY dissimilar to that of Haskell Institute and other federally mandated Indian Boarding Schools, which were not established by the federal government until many years after the closure of the Mission.** Two of the children in Haskell's baby cemetery are members of my tribe, Wyandot; I know the history of Haskell very well. BUT unlike Haskell and other boarding schools, **Parents VOLUNTARILY sent their children to the Mission to learn reading, writing, math, and a vocation that would earn the child a decent wage as an adult.** Children were not kept from parents and parents were not kept from children, many children lived off site (i.e., at home) and from 1854 to 1862, immediately prior to the Mission's closure, the Mission was only a day school (i.e., students did not live onsite at all during those years). The Kansas

State Historical Society, City of Fairway, and the SIMSHS Foundation are good stewards of the Mission and Indigenous history at the Mission. Wyandots, Delaware, Shawnee (including Bertha Cameron and Lille and Herb Morrison) and citizens of other tribes have been involved in Mission programming for at least 60 years.

- The Mission was established at the request of Chief Pascal Fish Sr. After his death his son Pascal Fish Jr., who was married to my g-great aunt, Hester Zane, became chief of the Shawnee Fish Tribe. **Just as there are several Shawnee Tribes currently in Oklahoma, there were several Shawnee Tribes in Kansas during the Missions operations, including the Shawnee Fish Tribe, the Shawnee Black Bob Tribe (located on the land that became the Sunflower Ammunition Plant), the Shawnee tribe headed by the Shawnee Prophet (located near White Church).** When Hester Zane died, her children Eudora (name sake of Eudora, KS) and Leander, were raised in Quindaro by my abolitionist g-great grandparents, Ebenezer O. and Rebecca Zane, who were station masters on the Underground Railroad and owned and operated the Wyandot House Hotel there. Hester and Eudora are buried in my tribe's sacred burial ground in Kansas City, Kansas (the Wyandott National Burial Ground).
- 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.
- **Federal law, including the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA), would supersede / nullify any conditions placed by the State on the use of the Mission or land upon which it stands.** As my tribe's attorney general in the late 1990s, acting in a pro bono capacity, I spent 4 years in federal court with the Governor of Kansas, the Kansas Attorney General and the Kickapoo in Kansas (and its attorney general Mario Gonzalez, Oglala) to oppose the federal government's approval of class II gaming on my tribes sacred burial grounds in Kansas City, Kansas (the Wyandott National Cemetery).

*As a Kansan, a reinactor / speaker / volunteer at the Mission since the 1960s, and a citizen of the Wyandot Nation of Kansas, who cares about Kansas history and my tribe's history, I do not want the most historic site in Kansas given away. **The Kansas State Historical Society and the City of Fairway have been good stewards of the Mission; I have witnessed this firsthand.*** I 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,



Holly R. Zane

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