



Kansas Black Leadership Council

Opponent Written Testimony on House Bill 2476

House Committee on Federal and State Affairs

Kerry Gooch – Kansas Black Leadership Council

February 14, 2024

Chair and Members of the Committee,

It is our firm position as the Kansas Black Leadership Council to stand in opposition to House Bill 2476 because of its several concerns for Black Kansans.

As a community, we find it paramount that our history and our nation's history are learned, celebrated, and preserved. National Heritage sites aim to do this by using federal and state dollars to preserve sites that paint a vibrant picture of areas, landmarks, and trails that highlight that rich history. In Kansas, that could be seen in national historic sites like Nicodemus, the Brown v. Board National Historical Park, and the Pony Express National Historic Trail. For the black community, these sites tell stories of perseverance, community, and strength. We would be ourselves a disservice as a legislature to not take advantage of honoring, educating on, and celebrating our state's rich history on a national scale— something the national historical designation system allows and supports us in doing.

A major concern of HB 2476 is it interferes with essential funding and resources these national sites receive. These state and federal funds and grants are essential to the preservation and programming needed to function and run properly. Tying these essential resources to the bureaucracy of the Kansas legislature seems like a major concern and could have major implications on the upkeep and maintenance of these historical sites and trails. Sites that rely more heavily on this funding from the federal and state governments would face the unintended consequences of tying essential funding up in bureaucracy. The legislature has a long history of bureaucracy and time being our enemy when it comes to the 90-day timeframe we have to pass not only bills but also carry out essential duties such as the budget. With national historic sites already going through a rigorous process to receive national status and funding, adding this extra responsibility to the legislature makes no sense.

HB 2476 does little to outline the processes and criteria used to receive “approval of the legislature.” Because of this unclear process, we worry that there is a potential for many sites to not receive funding due to bureaucratic and potentially nonsensical reasons that have little to do with historical significance. Especially when taking into consideration the makeup of the legislature not being reflective of the makeup of our diverse state, especially in regard to race, there is major concern about this bill having a negative impact on sites that pertain to black and brown communities. In a legislature that lacks the state's diversity, we ask people who may not see the historical significance, although nationally recognized, to determine whether they deserve the resources they need to stay operating and afloat. In Kansas this session alone, we are still debating whether DEI initiatives should be allowed in higher education; the legislature should have no business in deciding what history should be maintained and preserved when we can't even acknowledge that this history should be taught in our classrooms.

Conclusion – HB 2476 lacks clarity in its processes, posing a major concern to Black Kansans and our history. Blocking funding in the name of bureaucracy could take away resources that are crucial to the preservation and programming of these sites. We do not need the legislature's extra stamp of approval on sites that our nation has already recognized as being of historical significance. This is why we urge you to vote in opposition to HB 2476.