

Neutral Position on HB 2723

This bill is to provide \$40 million in matching grants to address homelessness at the local level. Addressing homelessness is an important issue but I am concerned that it is being approached in the wrong fashion. The current approach in the Wichita/Sedgwick County Metro Area has the real risk of creating an entitlement.

We have all seen the disaster created by President Johnson's great society. He naively stated that we would solve poverty. Here we are 50 years later, having spent literally trillions of dollars, and we have just as many poor in this country as we did the day he launched this program. The poor now believe they are entitled to this assistance. They have to do almost nothing for the help. Government does not require personal responsibility.

There have been efforts to implement work requirements to welfare. These have been met with some success but have been inconsistent depending on the whims of the current President. Clinton imposed some work requirements, Obama eliminated them.

There is no doubt that Christians have a responsibility to give to the poor. While the scriptures do not directly state this, multiple verses in the scriptures assume that giving to the poor is a Christian responsibility. See Matthew 6:3, Luke 19:8, Romans 15:26, 2 Corinthians 8:3 and more. Proverbs 28:27 may be the most compelling "He who gives to the poor suffers no want, but he who ignores them gets many a curse".

Jesus said "The poor you will always have with you..." (Matthew 26:11). Jesus also said "...Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God..." (Mark 12:17).

The concern here is who is responsible to address homelessness; government or the churches? No where in the scriptures does this responsibility fall on government (Caesar). It clearly falls on Christians. The question then becomes whether a Christian focused government should address homelessness? I think history in the USA says that is not a good idea. In the USA this becomes entitlement instead of real help.

I urge the legislature to stay in the correct lane here. If we are not careful, we will create an entitlement instead of helping the poor. It is laudable for the government to come alongside the churches to help the poor but it has to be church/faith lead, not government lead.

It behooves the legislature to NOT provide this grant to government entities. Rather to church lead programs for the poor/homeless. I personally have worked with homeless for the about the past 10 years. I can tell you the current effort in the Wichita/Sedgwick County Metro Area did not even invite to the table significant faith organizations that have a long history of helping the homeless. That is very scary. It looks like a big government solution to a very human issue.

As Jesus said we will always have the poor. Our challenge is to not eliminate homelessness, as we will never achieve that goal just like Johnson's great society never eliminated poverty. But what we can do different is help reduce homelessness by working on the human level. That is something government cannot do, that is where churches can make a difference.

Respectfully Submitted,

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