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February 9, 2024

SB 373 - Prohibiting the use of public moneys for lobbying activities. – Opposition testimony from Jamie R. Doss, representing KCCEO

Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jamie R Doss, Saline County Clerk and Acting Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Kansas County Clerks and Election Officials Association (KCCEO). I am writing to express our association's opposition to Senate Bill No. 373, which aims to prohibit the use of public funds for lobbying activities. While I acknowledge the importance of fiscal responsibility and transparency in government spending, I believe that this bill may have unintended consequences and hinder the democratic process as well as impact the right to free speech.

First and foremost, citizens have the right to participate in the democratic process and engage with their elected representatives. Lobbying, when conducted ethically and transparently, serves as a vital means for individuals and organizations to communicate their concerns, share expertise, and advocate for policies that align with the best interests of the public. Restricting the use of public funds for lobbying may unduly limit the ability of citizens and organizations to exercise their right to petition the government.

Furthermore, the exceptions outlined in the bill do not adequately address the nuanced nature of lobbying activities. The provision allowing communication on the request of a legislator or for requests related to legislative action or appropriations that are deemed necessary for the efficient conduct of public business is too restrictive. It is crucial to recognize that lobbying efforts often go beyond immediate legislative action and play a vital role in shaping long-term policies that impact the welfare of our communities.

Additionally, the imposition of penalties, including fines and disciplinary actions, seems disproportionate and could discourage public servants from engaging in legitimate and necessary lobbying activities. The civil fines proposed in the bill may have an effect on advocacy efforts and hinder the ability of individuals and organizations to effectively communicate their perspectives to policymakers.

In conclusion, I urge you to reconsider Senate Bill No. 373 to ensure that it does not impede the democratic process or infringe upon the rights of citizens to engage with their government. Striking a balance between fiscal responsibility and civic engagement is crucial, and I believe that a more nuanced approach is needed to address the complexities associated with lobbying activities.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I trust that you will carefully consider the potential consequences of Senate Bill No. 373 on the democratic principles that our state values and the fundamental right to free speech and citizen participation.

Respectfully submitted.

Jamie R Doss, Saline County Clerk/Election Officer - KCCEO Legislative Acting Chair