



March 19, 2024

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce and our nearly 1,500 members, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of S.B. 542, Making Appropriations For The Kansas Department For Aging And Disability Services For Fy 2025 And Creating A Program For Cities And Counties To Improve And Develop Infrastructure For Homeless Shelters.

The Chamber specifically wishes to provide feedback on the \$40M included in the governor's budget for a matching grant program for homelessness infrastructure. This money would require a dollar-for-dollar match by local units of government and could only be used for infrastructure-related purposes. It could not be used for operations and would not be an ongoing source of funding.

The Chamber supports this legislation due to the severe issues being faced by not just Wichita but communities across the state. It is our belief that we have truly reached a point of crisis, and action by the state and local governments is urgently needed. To be clear, the Chamber is here today because this has become an issue that affects the business community in Wichita.

While the Chamber supports the funding for this program, we do not believe it should be a no-strings-attached proposition. The Kansas Legislature should adopt and attach policies to the money that would be granted. Camping and vagrancy ordinances need to exist and be enforced in communities receiving funds. Wraparound services must be offered and ensure that those temporarily housed in shelters transition to some form of permanent housing and not just back to the streets. With this in mind, we support claw back provisions to ensure local governments comply with requirements set forth by the legislature.

In closing, there has been much disagreement regarding just exactly where this money should come from. The Chamber stands before you today to make clear we do not care what budget this money comes from. However, this is a major problem that must be solved. Local communities, through their local governments and not-for-profits can fund ongoing operations, but they lack the funds to construct or remodel the required facilities. This problem cannot be solved without the partnership and participation of the state of Kansas.

Thank you and I am happy to answer questions at the appropriate time.

Very truly yours,

Jason P. Watkins