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**Written Testimony in Opposition to HB 2119, Eliminating the Kansas affordable housing tax credit act
by Rabbi Moti Rieber, Executive Director**

House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development, Rep. Sean Tarwater, chair
February 6, 2025

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. I serve as executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multifaitth issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” on a variety of important social and economic justice issues. We work with many of the Mainline denominations in Kansas, including the Central States Synod of the ELCA Lutheran Church and the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC), as well as dozens of congregations and thousands of people of faith and conscience throughout the state. I submit testimony in opposition to HB 2119.

Among the most pressing problems facing Kansas today are the twinned problems of affordable housing and homelessness. Whenever I travel within our state and speak to clergy, the issue of homelessness is among the first thing they mention. Churches are often the “first responders” to homelessness, with food banks or shelter, so they see the problem more up-close than most. And of course caring for the less fortunate is to the mission of many faith communities.

One of the main causes of homelessness – perhaps the single main cause - is the lack of affordable housing. According to the ELCA Lutheran Church:

People of faith have worked to address housing needs in our communities for generations. This rich history comes from a fundamental, traditional and even scriptural understanding that a secure home is an essential need of the human person. In the ELCA social message “Homelessness: A Renewal of Commitment” (1990) and other social teachings, we have affirmed housing as a “human right” that must be protected and affirmed in our society.¹

The issue, stated plainly, is that the main way to prevent homelessness is to have more affordable housing.

Kansas – like all other states -- has an affordable housing shortage. For households making about \$50,000 per year, Kansas needs an additional 100,000 homes. The lack of housing limits the fluidity of the housing market (people upsizing into family homes or downsizing into smaller, “empty-nest” homes); as well as the

¹ “Why Should Lutherans Be Involved in Housing Advocacy?” in *Housing: A Practical Guide For Learning, Advocating And Building*, ELCA World Hunger, https://elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Housing_Guide.pdf, p. 25.

ability to keep working- and middle-class people (teachers, first responders, nurses, childcare workers) in our communities; and to attract businesses to our state, especially to our rural communities.

It is clear that without state action, sufficient affordable housing will not be built. This has been proven by long experience: the market on its own will not solve this problem; it needs state involvement. Kansas happens to have a policy in place that has been remarkably successful in triggering housing development throughout the state: the Affordable Housing Tax Credit (AHTC), which was passed with an overwhelming bipartisan majority only three years ago. And it's been remarkably successful: In the years since the credit was enacted, the state's production of affordable housing has grown from around 1000 homes in 2021, to more than 6000 between 2022 and 2024, roughly doubling the rate of development.²

While we understand that the program can be expensive, it has already shown its effectiveness. Given the conversation in this legislature about homelessness over the past couple of years, and the fact that the lack of affordable housing exacerbates that problem, it makes little sense to us to take away the most successful (and perhaps the only significant) policy Kansas has to help address this pressing problem.

The AHTC is an investment in our moderate-income workforce; in both our rural and urban areas; and in our competitiveness. Most importantly for communities of faith, it is a moral issue: recognizing the personal and societal cost of housing insecurity as well as our collective responsibility, through our government, to help address it. The AHTC is a policy that makes life easier for those in our communities with moderate incomes – the lifeblood of our communities. We urge this committee to keep it in place, and to oppose HB 2119.

Thank you for your attention.

² KHRC Annual Reporting Requirements: Kansas Affordable Housing Tax Credit Act, KHRC (Jan.13, 2025)