

Proponent Testimony for House Bill 2160: Protection for Municipal Employees Reporting Unlawful, Unethical, or Dangerous Conduct

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Bourbon County, Kansas  
February 12, 2025

Chairperson Bergquist, Vice Chairperson Blex, and other honorable Representatives, thank you for allowing me to testify on a bill that I feel is important to protect individuals who are willing to uncover government dishonesty. Due to the adverse weather, I am unable to attend in person. My Name is Susan Walker. I have lived in Bourbon County, KS for 32 years and have served our community in some form of local government for over 25 years. I am not the traditional individual who graduated from high school went to college and started a family. I did just the opposite. I graduated from high school, got married, had children, and worked full time while attending college with two children under the age of 4. Everything I have accomplished in my career has been due to having a strong work ethic and dedication to serving my community. Over the years, I have served as the Business Manager for USD 234, Finance Director and Assistant City Manager for the City of Fort Scott and most recently the CFO for Bourbon County.

Arrogance, dishonesty, and unethical behavior has threatened the lifelong career I have built in a community that I love and call home. I am here today to express the importance of having a whistleblower law in place to protect individuals who see unethical behaviors and illegal transactions and report them to the proper authorities. While working for Bourbon County and the City of Fort Scott, I witnessed self-dealing, non-disclosure of elected officials owning businesses, extremely unethical behavior, and possible misuse of federal grants and public funds.

I was sought out by the Bourbon County Commission to be CFO for Bourbon County in 2022 to help address five years of audit violations. The main objective as CFO was to fix the audit deficiencies and aid elected officials on financial statutory requirements. This assistance was not always welcomed by the elected officials. While I have accomplished the tasks I was hired to do, it did not come without uncomfortable conversations and further threatening a career I have spent all my life building.

Generally, wrongdoing in local government can be uncovered through contractual and financial transactions. Since all my roles in local government have been in a financial capacity, I have witnessed firsthand questionable transactions. My biggest fear has always been retaliation, or the loss of my job and this fear became a reality while working for Bourbon County.

In May of 2023, I experienced a new form of retaliation, and some may view it as political manipulation. I was coerced to run for a public office because my job was being threatened to be eliminated as a possible political move. Behind closed doors, things were said that led me to believe that I would not have a job if I did not run for a public office that paid \$35,000 less than what I was making. Since there is not a current law to protect me, I am fearful of sharing much detail on the subject with you. However, in summary, there has been questionable dealings over the years concerning federal and local dollars, omitted business disclosures, and elected officials using their

position for personal gain. When I have reported or pointed out concerns over the past ten years, in my eyes became the victim of retaliation, harassment, and intentionally publicly defamed by elected officials.

Our society has turned into a society of bullies. Healthy debate does not exist any longer. Financial issues that I brought to light and felt were questionable in the past have often left me feeling vulnerable to losing my job. Honestly, this past year has changed me professionally and individually. I look back at all the good things I have been a part of in our community and in my heart know I must stand up for what is right. I am disappointed in the division that some of these acts I have spoken on has caused in our community, leading people to not trust our local government. Since there is not a law in place like the one being introduced there is not a lot of ways to disseminate all sides of the story in a professional way. Not only have I suffered emotionally from past events, but my family has as well. This whistleblower law is imperative to hold elected and appointed officials accountable for their actions. I hope my story helps protect individuals in similar roles in the future. By passing this new whistleblower law local government employees will be afforded the same protection that is given to federal and state employees.

Respectfully submitted,

*Susan E. Walker*

Susan E. Walker, Bourbon County Clerk