

Senate Bill 223 - Testimony in Support

To: The Senate Committee on Assessment and Taxation

Dear Chairperson Tyson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jordan Perez, and I serve as the Superintendent of USD 407 in Russell, Kansas. I am writing to express my full support for Senate Bill 223. As an educator and administrator, I have witnessed firsthand the urgent need to address our district's aging facilities. It is a harsh reality when teachers must choose between cooling their classrooms or effectively educating their students. Our buildings lack HVAC systems, forcing us to rely on window units. While we take pride in equipping most classrooms with these units, they are far from an adequate solution for a conducive learning environment. Personally, I have experienced the extreme temperatures in our buildings, with sweat dripping down my back even in the early hours of the school day.

Beyond climate control, our facilities face additional critical challenges. We lack storm shelters, safe and secure entrances, and updated ADA-compliant equipment. The last successful bond election in our district was in 1959, leading to the construction of our high school in 1962. Schools should serve as cornerstones of their communities—places that inspire pride. Unfortunately, as we witness neighboring districts passing bond measures to modernize their facilities, we recognize the risk of losing students and families, particularly with the impact of Open Enrollment and our already declining enrollment.

Through extensive community engagement, it has become clear that our residents struggle to support a bond initiative without the assistance of a sales tax. As a result, we are advocating for county-wide sales tax approval, modeled after Rawlins County's approach. Our proposal seeks to distribute the generated revenue equitably among the four school districts that serve Russell County students. We have proactively engaged with surrounding school districts, ensuring transparency and collaboration in developing this plan with the best interests of all in mind.

I respectfully request your support in granting Russell County special permission to implement this sales tax, allowing our community the opportunity to decide its own future. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jordan Perez
Superintendent, USD 407