



PO Box 654
Lawrence, KS 66044
KansasInterfaithAction.org

<https://kansasinterfaithaction.org>
mrieber@kansasinterfaithaction.org
(913) 232-2336

Rabbi Moti Rieber, Executive Director
Rev. Dr. Annie Ricker, Board Chair

Written Testimony in Opposition to HB 2119, Eliminating the Kansas affordable housing tax credit act

by Rabbi Moti Rieber, Executive Director

Senate Committee on Commerce, Sen. Larry Alley, chair

March 6, 2025

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I serve as executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multifaith issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” on a variety of important social and economic justice issues. I am opposed 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 one of the first things 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 central 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

Stated plainly, 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 estimated 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 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.

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.

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 to support affordable 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 cost of the program increases over time, 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 eliminate the most successful (and perhaps the only significant) policy Kansas has enacted to 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)