

## **Testimony in Favor of SB 70**

**Gary Morgan - Shawnee, KS**

**To: Senator Kellie Warren and Judiciary Committee**

**Time: 10:30AM Monday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025 (Old Supreme Court Room)**

Dear Senator Warren and distinguished committee members,

I stand before you today and offer my full support for SB70.

If any one thing that we all witnessed and experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic it was that of heavy censorship by not only social media but by government entities such as school boards, city councils, health boards, and also county commission boards. All of these entities mentioned are generally subject to KOMA (Kansas Open Meetings Act) of which this bill intends to address.

I can speak with good authority concerning my own experiences in Johnson County more specifically the Board of County Commissioner's meetings where as going on two years now the public comments portion of the meetings were being blocked or excluded from the otherwise live streaming broadcast or the recorded portion of the commission's meetings. The concern and reason used by the chairman to exclude these comments from being broadcast live was that the streaming service was threatening to terminate the JO CO live stream account because of potential mis-information or dis-information from being shared by the general public regarding election integrity concerns within Johnson County. When this claim was further investigated, the board chairman could not provide any evidence whatsoever that this threat was ever made by the streaming platform (in this case YouTube) thus it would seem that the chairman himself was acting to censor the public comments so that a bigger audience of the public with access to the live stream or recorded meeting could NOT hear what public comments/concerns were being shared during the meeting.

On a side note this same chairman also reduced the time per speaker to a rigid 2 minutes in what had been traditionally 3-5 mins. Anyone with any communications or speaking experience know that it is nearly impossible to make any real significant point with only two minutes time to speak causing us to sometimes "tag team" a longer singular message over 3 or 4 people but that is a different topic for another day.

Because of this particular chairman's prerogative. . . he was able to effectively suppress the general public from knowing what other resident citizens were presenting at the commission meetings. This is and continues to be a clear and purposeful suppression of our 1<sup>st</sup> amendment rights.

In the particular case of the BOCC meeting in JO CO, I and few other volunteers have religiously attended these meetings with our own video cameras to record the public comments portion of the meetings and then to post them to various social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Telegram, etc. This has taken hours of our time and commitment to do this each week and the bottom line is our voice is not being heard as far and wide as it should be! Either public comments are or are not part of the official records of a public meeting.

My simple point is that given the current state of Kansas law it gives too much latitude to those elected officials to censor the public from hearing what others in the public are saying and questioning our elected officials. Can you imagine not live streaming this very public hearing or having the ability to archive the testimonies from the general public?

Please support SB70 to insure that WE the PEOPLE hold the power of government oversight of public meetings and insure their transparency that WE the PEOPLE demand!

Thank you.