
Written Testimony in Support of SB 348
Before the Kansas Senate Committee on Utilities

Southern Pioneer Electric Company Consumer Advisory Council
Tom Walters, Chairman

January 22, 2026

Chairman Fagg, Vice Chair Petersen, Ranking Member Francisco and members of the Senate Committee on Utilities, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments in support of SB 348 on behalf of the Consumer Advisory Council (“CAC”) of Southern Pioneer Electric Company (“Southern Pioneer”). My name is Tom Walters, and I serve as Chairman of the Consumer Advisory Council for Southern Pioneer Electric Company.

The Southern Pioneer CAC represents the interests of Southern Pioneer customers, ensuring their voices are heard in decisions that affect our electric service and community. Our council is made up of people who live and work in the areas Southern Pioneer serves, so we understand firsthand the challenges and needs of our neighbors. Southern Pioneer’s CAC is representative of all customer classes, including urban and rural representation. The CAC provides input regarding issues impacting ratepayers and represents the consumers in terms of the consumers’ and communities’ needs, and preferences. The Council also acts as an advocate, providing consumer perspective during quarterly meetings on energy related issues, quality of service, upcoming events and future services. Listed below are the members of the CAC, where they are from, and their customer class.

Charlie Swayze, Medicine Lodge – Commercial
Tom Walters, Medicine Lodge – General Service
Jerry Miller, Sublette – Residential
Scarlette Diseker, Liberal – Government
Rodney McDaniel, Sharon – Agriculture

Greg Stoppel, Sublette - Commercial
Joe Rausch, Sharon – General Service
Steve Merz, Liberal - Residential
Lawrence Hoerman, Sublette – Government

The CAC supports SB 348 because it would allow Southern Pioneer, a not-for-profit electric utility, to self-regulate—just like other electric cooperatives in Kansas. Currently, Southern Pioneer is the only non-investor-owned utility that is fully regulated by the Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC). This regulatory structure brings significant costs and delays that ultimately impact our customers.

Southern Pioneer spends hundreds of thousands of dollars each year on regulatory expenses. These costs are paid by our customers through higher electric rates. For a small utility, these

expenses are a major factor in rate increases. If Southern Pioneer could self-regulate, our rates would be lower and more stable.

The current regulations make it hard for Southern Pioneer to quickly respond to customer needs or offer special services. For example, it can take up to 8 months to receive approval for new projects. This lack of flexibility means we sometimes lose opportunities to serve new businesses, which hurts local economic growth. Delays and uncertainty from regulatory approvals have caused potential new businesses to choose other locations. This means fewer jobs and less growth for our communities. If Southern Pioneer could self-regulate, we could attract and support new businesses more effectively, helping our towns thrive.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our support for SB 348. In summary, supporting SB 348 means supporting lower costs, better service, and stronger local economies for Southern Pioneer communities. We respectfully ask the Committee to advance this bill so we can continue to serve our customers in the best way possible.

Tom Walters

Tom Walters, Chairman
Southern Pioneer Consumer Advisory Council