

February 2, 2022

RE: House Bill 2148 - Sales tax exemption entity request for Gage Park Memorial Inc.

Chairperson and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of Gage Park Memorial Inc, in support of HB 2148. If approved, HB 2148 will grant sales tax exemption entity status for Gage Park Memorial, Inc.

My name is Teresa Thomas. I appear before you today representing the committee for Gage Park Memorial Inc. Our mission is the development and maintenance of the Gage Park Memorial, located at the northwest corner of 10th and Gage Blvd. in Topeka, Kansas. The centerpiece of the park is a statue titled *Homage*, representing all soldiers. A circular walkway surrounds this central statue. At present, there is a WW I monument and a Korean War monument. Currently under construction is a WW II monument. Future construction plans include Vietnam War and War on Terrorism monuments.

Gage Park Memorial Inc. engages in an ongoing fundraiser in which bricks engraved with a name can be installed in various sections around the walkway in exchange for a \$50 donation. Other fundraisers include an annual car show at the memorial, and an annual motorcycle ride. The memorial has also received numerous direct donations from local individuals. Taken together, these proceeds make up approximately 95% of monies raised. All funds go directly to construction and maintenance costs. All committee member efforts are on a volunteer basis, so there are no overhead costs.

Passage of HB 2148 granting sales tax exemption for Gage Park Memorial, Inc. will have considerable financial impact on the ability of our organization to construct additional monuments to complete the memorial, such as the current project to erect a World War II monument. Estimated costs to complete the current and future planned monuments is \$300,000 to \$400,000 over the next six years. The cost savings from sales tax exemption will be significant.

Next, I want to address the issue of the human impact of the memorial park. I realize that this reflection is in no way pertinent to the fiscal question before the Committee, but feel it is nevertheless a necessary part of my witness. The emotions of people who visit the park are so often visible in their faces and in the attitude of reverence for its meaning, especially those who come to witness the laying of a memorial brick engraved with the name of a family member or close friend. These witnesses have ranged in age from babies to persons in their nineties. Sometimes it will be a lone

survivor on a very personal mission. On other occasions, it may be groups of thirty and even forty. Their reactions range from pride for the service of the person they are honoring, to open tears remembering the ultimate sacrifice of those killed in action. For some, looking around at the monuments and bricks reflects both the heroism of those who have served or are currently serving in the armed forces, as well as the horror of war itself. Seeing these emotional gatherings brings home the true purpose of the memorial park - to pass on the tradition of honoring and remembering veterans.

In closing, I want to thank you again, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for your consideration of HB 2148, and urge you to advance the bill to the floor of the full House of Representatives.