

**HB 2732**  
**House Committee on Taxation**  
**Proponent Testimony**  
**March 14, 2022**

Chairperson Smith and Members of the Committee:

As the District 9 Councilperson for the City of Topeka and a long-time business owner in our community, I strongly support House Bill 2732, a bill that will give our local voters the ability to determine whether to create the Gage Park Improvement Authority.

Gage Park, the Topeka Zoo, and the Discovery Center are located in District 9. I have witnessed first-hand the positive impact these entities have on our city, on tourism, and on the quality of life of those who live, work, and play in Northeast Kansas.

In addition to representing the Gage Park area, I am the City Council's appointed representative on the Topeka Zoo Board of Directors. In that role, I have closely observed the work of our Zoo Director, Brendan Wiley, and our Board President, Fred Patton. They have spent years studying our Zoo's governance model and determining the best options to provide funding to support the Zoo and its partners in Gage Park. They have sought out a model that will enable the Zoo to flourish while also reducing the Zoo's burden on our local property taxpayers. I have great trust in Brendan and Fred and, as such, wholeheartedly support their efforts to provide our local voters the ability to create the Gage Park Improvement Authority.

I look forward to working with the Gage Park entities and, most importantly, our community to determine over the next few years what the future holds for the Zoo, the Discovery Center, and the park in general. The passage of HB 2732 is critical to enabling us to be able to take the next steps of gathering public input and developing a long-term plan for the park. Once that process is complete, HB 2732 will allow us to ask the voters in Shawnee County whether or not the Gage Park Improvement Authority should be created.

Let me be clear. HB 2732 is about giving our local community a voice. The bill doesn't create the Authority. The bill gives voters in Shawnee County the ability to determine whether the Authority should be created, and if so, whether to support it with a fraction of a sales tax percentage. What's more democratic than giving our local voters a direct voice in the process?

Thank you for considering HB 2732 and for accepting my proponent testimony.

Sincerely,

Mike Lesser  
Topeka City Council  
District 9