

RE: HB 2717

OPPOSE

Written only

Date 3/28/2022

Chairman Olson, and members of the committee,

I testify in my capacity as a County Commissioner representing his district, and not as the Unified Government.

On November 8th, 1961, the voters of Kansas voted to allow our state to become a Home Rule state by constitutional amendment. Article 12, Section 5 states, "Cities are empowered to determine their local affairs and government..." The citizens of this state believed local governing bodies had the right to make decisions for their local communities, not the state. Any attempt to strip a local government's constitutional right to self-governance means we are ignoring the will of the people. House Bill 2717 does just that. It erodes the will of the people and the power of a local government to decide what is best for its community.

For years, the Legislature has taken small, calculated steps to undermine our state constitution by enacting legislation to preempt local governments from doing their job. State preemptions range from providing affordable housing to prevailing wages on local infrastructure projects. Why do local governments exist if the state is going to continue to strip our ability to govern our communities?

On February 10th, 2022, the duly elected governing body of the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, KS exercised its constitutional Home Rule right to pass and enact the Safe and Welcoming City Act. This ordinance is based on the premise of "local resources, for local purposes." We believe that our local law enforcement's duty is to serve and protect the community. Federal immigration law enforcement is not a local resource or local purpose. It is the resource and purpose of the Federal government, specifically the agency of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

My question to this committee is: why now? Why has the Attorney General made the decision to turn a local government's constitutional right into a partisan campaign tactic? Two other municipalities in this state have passed a similar ordinance, but there were crickets when those passed. Where was the Attorney General then? It's not a secret that Wyandotte County, overwhelmingly, supports one political party over the other and is the second most diverse county in this country, but why should that matter?

As a local governing body, we do not govern by political will. We listen to the needs of our constituents and leave political ideology out of our decision-making. That is the beauty of local governments! We are not bound to believe or profess the tenants of a certain political party. We listen and do what is best for our communities. Do not treat us or our constituents as political pawns.

Mr. Chairman and members of this committee, what message are you sending to your constituents and to the local governing bodies within your district, when you are continuously stripping away their right to Home Rule? When will the usurpation of our rights, granted to us by the Kansas Constitution, stop? You can stop the further erosion of our state constitution by voting No on HB 2717. Let us do that job we were duly elected to do!

Thank you,

Christian Ramirez,

County Commissioner, District 3

Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, KS