

Before the House Energy, Utilities, and Telecommunications Committee
Presented by Zack Pistora, Kansas Sierra Club
Informational Briefing on HB 2317
March 19, 2019



Chairman Seiwert and honorable members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide remarks on HB 2317, which amend existing law concerning electric transmission lines and siting. Specifically, HB 2317 would create the definition of an “urban electric transmission line” and requires an electric utility to acquire to a siting permit from the Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) prior to beginning site preparation. The bill prompts the utility and KCC to consider the need for the proposed transmission line as well as the reasonableness of the location due to its local aesthetics, location, environment and population density of the proposed site.

The Sierra Club is very accustomed to being a cooperative stakeholder regarding energy development, especially in terms of impacts upon the natural environment and local communities. Thus, the Sierra Club has developed many guiding principles to help reduce negative consequences of transmission lines upon nearby neighbors and ecosystems.

“Resource siting and deployment must always take into account the specific conditions of each location and minimize the damage to natural systems, flora and fauna, wild places and nearby communities.”

HB 2317 strives for a more transparent and inclusive process for siting transmission lines to help inform those impacted. The Sierra Club agrees that a more transparent and inclusive process for resource siting and deployment is a necessary and smart approach for the long-term success of a project.

In our view, HB 2317 is a consequence of a ‘learned lesson’, of what a transmission siting process should NOT be; the case study of Westar’s urban transmission project in northeast Wichita last year revealed an example of a utility not being transparent and inclusive on resource siting. This specific example in Wichita highlights a need for a utility to consider its impacts regarding environmental and social justice.

Environmental Justice must be considered and impacts to local diverse communities' social, economic and other realms must be understood and mitigated to ensure fair treatment and participation for all.

Local communities should be part of the discussion so that local benefits and impacts can be understood by all, especially low-income communities. Often times, project developers can begin a dialogue with the local communities near the project site to craft a "Community Benefits Agreement" to spell out how the project will mitigate impacts and benefit the nearby community.

People have the right to participate in the development of rules, regulations, plans, and evaluation criteria and at every level of decision-making. Finally, our policy states that *no community should bear disproportionate risks of harm because of their demographic characteristics or economic condition.*

Because other states have enacted policies that require permits for upgraded transmission lines, HB 2317 may be a reasonable path forward.

Thank you,

Zack Pistora | Legislative Director and State Lobbyist, Kansas Chapter of Sierra Club
zackpistora@gmail.com | 785-865-6503

The Sierra Club is the largest grassroots environmental organization dedicated to enjoying, exploring, and protecting our great outdoors. The Kansas Chapter represents our state's strongest grassroots voice on environmental matters for over forty years.