



February 24, 2021

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce and our nearly 1,500 members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in opposition to H.B. 2233; AN ACT concerning municipalities; enacting the municipal historic building act; requiring approval by majority vote of qualified city electors before taking certain actions involving certain public buildings.

The bill would require a city to hold a public vote and receive public approval through a vote in order to sell, destroy, demolish, dispose of, or otherwise alienate any public building that is more than 80,000 square feet in size and has been placed on the national register of historic places. The bill also requires the city to cover the cost of the election.

There are only two buildings in the state impacted by this bill: Century II and the former Wichita Public Library. What you have before you is a city issue, and we stand in opposition because we believe **city issues should be addressed by elected city officials, not state representatives.** Each of you understands the frustration of having the federal government infringe on your ability to make decisions for the state. For elected city officials, adoption of this bill is akin to the federal government taking away your decision-making authority. For the integrity of local control, we ask you to oppose this legislation.

The Chamber is supportive of a process by which citizens are involved in the study, planning, and decision-making process regarding public buildings and all matters pertaining to local government operations. And indeed, that process has been provided for as it pertains to Century II and the former library building. Numerous focus groups and listening sessions have occurred. The public has had access to meetings with consultants that have explored options related to both these buildings. This process has included the exploration of maintaining the status quo, privatizing the facility, demolishing it for the construction of a new state-of-the-art convention and performing arts facility. Further, the city has already promised the public a vote. In the Chamber's view, this is as it should be. Local citizens petition their locally elected officials, community members, and elected leaders to engage in discourse and arrive at decisions through the democratic process. It would be wholly inappropriate for the legislature to interfere in this process.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Committee reject H.B. 2233.

Very truly yours,

Jason P. Watkins