

January 12, 2024

Representative K.C. Ohaebosim
Kansas State Capitol Building
300 SW 10th St.; Room 173-W
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Representative K.C. Ohaebosim,

The City of Bel Aire values your service and continued support for legislative priorities that improve the quality of life for citizens in our community. We are committed to good governance through careful local stewardship and look to you, Governor Kelly and the Kansas legislature to support us in those efforts.

The Bel Aire Governing Body has identified the following priorities as very important to our community and state. We respectfully ask for your support in these specific areas during the 2024 legislative session. As members of the League of Kansas Municipalities, we also support their Statement of Municipal Policy for 2024 which is much more expansive.

For 2024, Bel Aire has identified the following topics as highly important to our city and appreciate your support of legislation that addresses these priorities:

1. **Government Competition.** Local governments should retain local control over the services they provide to residents and businesses. If the citizens of a community believe the private sector does not serve, efficiently serve or effectively serve the needs of that community, the local government should be able to provide those. In Bel Aire, we operate a Recreation Center that was established in 1994. At that time, only the YMCA was an option but was located several miles away in Wichita. Over time, the Recreation Center has become a gem to our community and the main place where events are held. It is the community gathering place for our residents and therefore invaluable to the quality of life for Bel Aire residents. We OPPOSE any legislation restricting government services.
2. **City Elections.** We OPPOSE any actions by the state government to impose partisan elections on cities. Our Governing Body was elected for our stance on issues and commitment to Bel Aire, not based on a party affiliation.
3. **Sales Tax & Exemptions.** Cities should continue to retain voter-approved local sales tax allocations just as the Legislature is granted authority to make decisions relating to statewide sales tax. Local sales taxes are limited to 2% and must be approved by the voters of that jurisdiction. Many local communities rely on those local sales taxes to fund streets, economic development and even provide property tax reductions. Bel Aire does not currently have a local sales tax but does receive a portion of the Sedgwick County sales tax and values having that option for future projects.
4. **Property Valuation.** We SUPPORT appraisals based on fair-market value as historically used in Kansas and oppose caps on property valuations. We understand the concerns by taxpayers about recent valuation increases due to the real estate market. However, state limitations imposed on valuation methods shift the property tax burden, benefiting one category of property to the detriment of all others is unconstitutional and inequitable. In Bel Aire, we have lowered our mill levy the last three years to offset some of those

increases but the point is those decisions are best left at the local level. We OPPOSE any changes to or limitations on property value appraisals.

5. **Medicaid Expansion.** We OPPOSE expansion of Medicaid.
6. **Transportation.** We SUPPORT a modern and sustainable transportation system that meets the needs of all Kansans. We also support fully funding the IKE program as well as the needed improvements along the K254 Corridor from Wichita to El Dorado.
7. **Water.** Access to water is paramount for the growth and viability of communities. Governments at all levels should pursue the conservation, protection, and development of current and future water supplies to ensure access to clean, safe, and affordable water. We SUPPORT any legislation that accomplishes these goals as well as additional funding for such needs.

Please review our priority list and make careful consideration of our input when bills are introduced that relate to one of those priority issues. We also ask you thoroughly review all legislation and oppose any that erodes our constitutional home rule authority. Conversely, we ask you support any legislation that strengthens local government home rule. We believe the best government is closest to the people and that local government should have the ability to govern in way that best meets their needs. In 1961, Kansas voters approved a constitutional amendment giving local communities the ability to govern themselves through home rule. We all took an oath to support the constitution of the state of Kansas and therefore it should be the goal of all elected officials, at any level, to support that amendment approved by the voters.

Our governing body is more than willing to meet with you to discuss how any potential legislation might affect our community or the state. Please feel free to email or call me at any time if you need additional information from us on any issue. My email is JBenage@belaireks.gov and I can be reached at (316) 684-0226.

Thank you for taking the time to understand and champion these priorities on behalf of the City of Bel Aire. Our citizens truly appreciate your time and commitment as our Representative and what you do in Topeka.

Respectfully,

Mayor Jim Benage