

April 8, 2026

Mr. Phil LeVota  
Jackson County Executive  
415 E. 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
Kansas City, MO 64106

Mr. LeVota,

As Jackson County taxing jurisdictions, we respectfully write to express our concern with your plans for property tax credits for prior years and for caps placed on certain commercial properties. We appreciate prior opportunities to confer with you and your staff. However, from those meetings, the taxing jurisdictions have been told—despite our questions and concerns related to all Jackson Countians—that you will continue with these proposed property tax measures. This is a departure from the longstanding relationship between the County and taxing jurisdictions. That relationship has worked within the legal frameworks required to protect taxpayers and to ensure that taxing jurisdictions can provide services to those taxpayers. The proposed tax credits and caps on certain commercial properties are not supported by the law, recent court orders, nor by orders and guidance from the State Tax Commission (“STC”). This unprecedented departure jeopardizes the provision of those basic services and our taxing jurisdictions' ability to deliver them to all Jackson Countians.

You have stated that the County will move forward with property tax credits to taxpayers for 2023 and 2024. A decision to move forward with tax credits for 2023 and 2024 is not supported by the STC orders, and it clearly violates the law and recent court orders pertaining to Jackson County.

You have stated that the County will cap 2025 commercial property increases for properties assessed at \$5,000,000 or less at 15%. Similarly, such a decision is not supported by the County charter, is not supported by Missouri law, and improperly shifts that commercial property tax burden to the residential taxpayers of Jackson County.

Taxing jurisdictions have been repeatedly told by County officials that they can recoup the tax credit losses through recoupment levies. Some taxing jurisdictions may be able to recoup some losses, but that is dependent on a number of factors, including current levies. What the County is not telling residents is that the purported “property tax relief” isn’t really tax relief at all. It will require those taxing jurisdictions that can implement recoupment levies to raise their levy rates, effectively maintaining property taxes where they are.

These proposals have the potential for catastrophic consequences for the services provided by Jackson County’s taxing jurisdictions. The upshot of the County’s disregard of the law and STC

guidance is diminishing public services, reductions in force of staff employed by these taxing jurisdictions, libraries reducing services, slower emergency response times, and larger class sizes, just to name a few. The taxing jurisdictions of the county have sought support from their communities in the form of levies and bonds and made promises to our citizens on these deliverables. Continuing with your current course of action blatantly ignores the universal impacts on Jackson County's citizens.

**As taxing jurisdictions, we do not assess or collect the taxes, but we rely on the County to do its job and follow the law.**

## **Background**

Based on the State Tax Commission's findings, Jackson County has undervalued properties for many years. Those years of undervalued and inadequate assessment resulted in revenues that have not kept pace with inflation. For that reason, the State Tax Commission ordered the County to increase its assessments in line with market values. In the State Tax Commission's Overview for Governor Kehoe's transition team, the STC's August 6, 2024, Overview stated:

**Counties Falling Behind Market Value**—County Assessors are required to assess property at market value. This current assessment cycle, over half of the counties will fall below the requirement to be between 90%-110% of market value. As the STC begins to have the necessary conversations with the counties to get them back on track towards market value or their reimbursement funds will be withheld, the STC is met with counties that state they don't need the reimbursement funds and will refuse to assess at market value. Currently, the STC has no other means to enforce market value assessments with a county other than to withhold the assessment reimbursement funding.

Jackson County is one of those counties with historically undervalued assessments. That does not pardon the assessment issues that have plagued the County, but it does set the context for why Jackson County was required to increase assessments.

Protections for taxpayers take prominence in Missouri's constitutional and statutory frameworks. As the STC and numerous courts have previously said, taxpayers have a right to appeal their taxes through the appropriate statutory frameworks. Failure to follow those frameworks forfeits a taxpayer's right to challenge an assessment.

The Hancock Amendment remains one of Missouri's most important taxpayer protections. By requiring taxing jurisdictions to roll back tax rates whenever reassessment growth exceeds the lesser of CPI or 5%, it ensures that increases in home values do not disproportionately increase taxpayers' bills. Historically, this safeguard has operated precisely as intended, moderating tax impacts even during periods of rapid market-driven valuation growth.

Through these recent assessment cycles, the Hancock Amendment continued to function as a cap on tax increases. As an example, through the 2023 assessment cycle, one Jackson County school district experienced a 19.5508% increase in assessed valuation, including a 25.1% increase for residential property. As required, the district **rolled back** its operating levy ceiling from \$4.9243 to \$4.3317—limiting new revenue to 5%, not 19.5508%.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Continuing with this example, as it relates to this specific Jackson County school district, for individual taxpayers, the protections are equally clear. A home valued at \$250,000 in 2022 (assessed at \$47,500) generated a levy of \$2,339 (\$47,500 AV/100 x \$4.9243). If that assessed value rose 20% in 2023 to \$57,000, due to the reduced tax rate, the tax would have increased to only \$2,469 (\$57,000 AV/100 x \$4.3317)—an increase of \$130 (+5.6%), or **approximately \$10.83 per month**. When averaged across Missouri's biennial reassessment cycle, this equates to an annual increase of less than 2.8% despite a 20% growth in assessed value. In this instance, if it is determined that the value should have only grown by 15%, the value would grow to \$54,625. Using that reduced assessed value and multiplying by the Hancock reduced levy, the new tax bill would be \$2,366. Under the proposed solution, a tax credit of \$103 would be granted to this taxpayer and **they would have paid only \$27 more in taxes for the 2023 tax year despite a 15% increase in the home's value**.

### **Legal Framework, STC Orders, and Court Orders**

The Missouri Supreme Court delivered a unanimous decision in *State ex re. Jackson County v. Chamberlain*, holding that a failure to exhaust administrative remedies meant that taxpayers could not seek other relief against Jackson County. In that case, the Court maintained the legal requirements for appealing assessments, requiring that taxpayers exhaust their administrative remedies under chapters 137 and 138 of the Missouri Revised Statutes. Under the required framework, complaints about property assessments are initially brought before a county board of equalization ("Board"), which shall "determine all appeals from the valuation of property made by the assessor ...." Section 138.060.1. Any appeal from a Board decision concerning the correct valuation shall be brought before the state tax commission ("Commission"). Section 138.430.1. The property owner, after having exhausted all administrative remedies, may seek judicial review in the circuit court. Section 536.100. The Missouri Supreme Court held that, because the taxpayers failed to exhaust all available administrative remedies, their lawsuit must be dismissed.

Since the *Chamberlain* decision, the County has been involved in ongoing litigation with the Attorney General, the State Tax Commission, and with taxpayers. As that litigation has played out, one constant has been the required administrative framework to appeal and protest one's taxes. In a current pending case against Jackson County, Judge Cook recently maintained this logic when denying tax credits dating back to 2023, stating that, to be eligible for tax refunds, taxpayers must timely file suit in the tax year in question, and that the failure to timely protest payment of taxes and to timely commence an action for a refund is fatal to a taxpayer's claims. "Once taxes... have been paid, they can only be recovered through proper statutory proceedings." (citing *Koehr v. Emmons*, 98, S.W.3d 580, 584 (Mo.Ct.App 2002)).

The STC entered two orders regarding Jackson County's recent assessments. Neither of those orders provides a basis, nor do they support, the County issuing tax credits for tax years 2023 and 2024. They also do not provide a legal basis, nor has the County expressed one that would allow for the capping of certain commercial property at 15% for 2025.

Practically speaking, taxing jurisdictions are required to budget, plan, and set their tax rates on an annual basis under the existing laws of the State of Missouri. If Jackson County illegally departs from the established laws and frameworks, taxing jurisdictions have no certainty in setting proposed levy rates, they would find it impossible to accurately budget, and this approach would adversely impact the services they provide to their patrons.

### **Tax Credits for Prior Tax Years Violate Missouri Law and Recent Court Orders**

Your recent proposals to provide tax credits across all properties for 2023 and 2024 violate the court orders issued in cases involving the County. In addition to violating the required statutory appeal process repeatedly expressed by the courts, the provision of tax credits is not supported by the State Tax Commission's orders in August 2024 and April 2025.

There is no support in the County charter, and issuing such refunds violates the County's own internal analyses. A County memo, as the County legislature was considering Resolution 21694, specifically discussed the County's liability if it were to issue tax credits and then seek to claw back those dollars from taxing jurisdictions. That memo discussed tax credits and stated in relevant part:

However, the money refunded is not, for the most part, Jackson County's money. It is money that was collected on behalf of the taxing jurisdictions, and it has been long-since distributed and likely spent. This is done through a process called "claw backs", where the County withholds any future distributions until the amount equal to the refunds has been collected back. This means that for school districts, for example, they will not get any of their planned distributions for the 2024-2025 school year until the County has recouped millions to tens of millions, depending on the district, in tax dollars to refund the taxpayers. **Making the unilateral decision not to defend the taxing jurisdictions assets despite clear evidence and past litigation that supports their position, would subject us to a significant likelihood that the taxing jurisdictions would file suit against us for that decision.**

If the County moves forward with tax credits for 2023 and 2024, in violation of the law, in violation of recent court orders, and without support from the STC's orders, the County would certainly be assuming and inviting the liability described in the Memo above.

## **The Commercial Property Tax Shifts Commercial Taxes to Jackson County Residents**

Similarly, the County Executive has no precedent or authority (legal or otherwise) to arbitrarily cap commercial properties assessed at \$5,000,000 or less at 15%. Additionally, there is nothing in the County charter that allows for such a cap, or for a unilateral decision by the County Executive to impose a cap.

Commercial property caps will impact different taxing jurisdictions in different ways. But what has not been communicated by the County is that if certain commercial properties are capped, and taxing jurisdictions are required to raise their levies to cope with that loss, those tax burdens will be shifted to residential property owners. The very "relief" that certain County officials have promised residential taxpayers is negated by imposing an unauthorized and manufactured cap to commercial property tax.

Without legal support to allow the County Executive to place such a cap on commercial properties, the County will again be open to liability from both impacted residential property owners and the taxing jurisdictions.

### **Conclusion**

Taxing jurisdictions have long partnered with the County to provide services to the taxpayers of Jackson County. This plays out every day in the County's schools, libraries, county infrastructure, and through emergency and health services. This partnership is intended to benefit all taxpayers and residents. This system is founded on a long-standing legal framework, and systems for assessing, protesting, appealing, and collecting taxes. What you have proposed in clawing back monies that have already been disbursed and spent by taxing jurisdictions is not only catastrophic for the citizens of Jackson County but lacks any legal support. The same holds for arbitrarily capping certain 2025 commercial properties.

As taxing jurisdictions, we respectfully ask that the County follow the law, follow the Court orders and legal precedent, and tailor its decisions accordingly. Failing to do so will require the taxing jurisdictions and the citizens of Jackson County to once again protect their rights in the courts of our State.

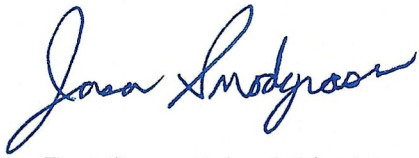
Sincerely,



Blue Springs School District  
Dr. Bob Jerome, Superintendent



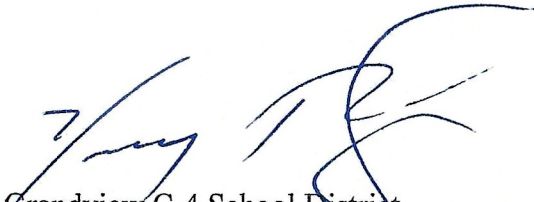
Center School District  
Dr. Troy Hogg, Interim Superintendent



Fort Osage School District  
Dr. Jason Snodgrass, Superintendent



Grain Valley Schools  
Dr. Brad Welle, Superintendent



Grandview C-4 School District  
Dr. Kenny Rodriquez, Superintendent



Hickman Mills C-1 School District  
Dr. Dennis Carpenter, Interim Superintendent



Independence School District  
Dr. Cindy Grant, Interim Superintendent



Kansas City Public Schools  
Dr. Jennifer Collier, Superintendent



Lee's Summit R-7 Schools  
Dr. David Buck, Superintendent



Lone Jack C-6 School District  
Mrs. Kathy Butler, Superintendent



Oak Grove R-VI School District  
Mrs. Mindy Hampton, Superintendent



Raytown C-2 School District  
Dr. Penelope Martin-Knox, Superintendent



Cooperating School Districts of Greater Kansas City  
Dr. Kenny Southwick

cc: The State Tax Commission  
Jackson County Legislature

Attachment

## ESTIMATED SCHOOL DISTRICT LOSSES

Based upon the revised estimated assessments for the Jackson County school districts for the 2023, 2024, and 2025 tax years, the table below shows individual district losses and the accumulative loss for Jackson County schools. It is understood that tax credits will be issued for the 2023 and 2024 assessment years in the 2026, 2027, and 2028 tax years. The 2025 commercial cap has already been felt by our school districts.

	<b>Total 2023, 2024, &amp; 2025</b>		
	<b>Oper \$ Loss</b>	<b>DS \$ Loss</b>	<b>Total \$ Loss</b>
FORT OSAGE SCHOOL R-I	\$ 6,795,960	\$ 1,447,437	\$ 8,243,396
BLUE SPRINGS SCHOOL R-IV	\$ 18,597,773	\$ 5,094,056	\$ 23,691,828
GRAIN VALLEY SCHOOL R-V	\$ 4,130,035	\$ 1,962,064	\$ 6,092,098
OAK GROVE SCHOOL R-VI	\$ 1,663,803	\$ 993,465	\$ 2,657,268
LEES SUMMIT SCHOOL R-VII	\$ 26,278,050	\$ 5,934,265	\$ 32,212,315
HICKMAN MILLS SCHOOL C-1	\$ 8,801,246	\$ 2,011,205	\$ 10,812,451
RAYTOWN SCHOOL C-II	\$ 13,932,999	\$ 3,002,908	\$ 16,935,907
GRANDVIEW SCHOOL C-IV	\$ 5,916,164	\$ 1,866,906	\$ 7,783,070
LONE JACK SCHOOL C-VI	\$ 979,925	\$ 684,567	\$ 1,664,492
INDEPENDENCE SCHOOL #30	\$ 15,894,746	\$ 3,413,541	\$ 19,308,287
KANSAS CITY SCHOOL #33	\$ 58,376,526	\$ 2,089,382	\$ 60,465,908
CENTER SCHOOL # 58	\$ 5,178,079	\$ 1,163,050	\$ 6,341,129
<b>TOTAL LOSS REVENUE</b>	<b>\$ 166,545,305</b>	<b>\$ 29,662,844</b>	<b>\$ 196,208,149</b>

In addition to the above losses, it is estimated that a total of \$75,680,945 will be lost across all of the other Jackson County taxing entities.