

Dear St. Louis County Council Members:

Please accept this email as a correction and addendum to my testimony of August 13 regarding Bill Number 153. When I spoke to you that day, I stated that there was no county in Missouri that had adopted a “county manager” style system. That statement was incorrect. Clay County voters in the Kansas City metropolitan area adopted a new county charter in 2022 (which I knew), and it is a “county manager” style of local government (which I did not know).

I learned this fact on Monday, August 19 during a conversation with a Clay County official on an unrelated matter.

While I want to correct that statement in my previous testimony, this information does not change my general skepticism on the county manager proposal for St. Louis County. The adoption of a county manager-system in Clay County is too recent to make judgements about its success or failure, but if St. Louis County continues to consider this idea in the coming years, St. Louis could eventually look to Clay County for lessons about the system.

While Clay is not a small county, it is also not that comparable to St. Louis. Clay has just over 250,000 residents compared to a million people in St. Louis. Many of the people of Clay County live within Kansas City, which provides most of their local public services. Clay County has only 15,400 unincorporated residents. Those are two reasons why despite having one-quarter of the population of St. Louis, Clay’s budget of \$164 million is only about sixteen percent of St. Louis’s (just over \$1 billion).

The following also should be noted about the system in Clay County.

- Their seven-member county commission elects three members at-large (i.e., countywide) and four members by district. There is evidence that there are policy benefits to such a combined system.
- I don’t know what they pay their current county manager, but the pay range for the position in their county pay plan is between \$148,806 and \$209,460.
- All of the elected officials are elected in a nonpartisan manner. I think that is a very poor idea that limits the key information most voters use to make decisions that align with their personal preferences. There is simply no evidence that when you take away the partisan cue that voters perform the extra work to make an informed decision.
- Clay County’s charter (they call it the county constitution) has a stringent non-interference rule for members of the county commission. Commission members are not even allowed to contact county personnel (other than the county administrator, presumably) for “purposes of inquiry”. They can only do so if

expressly directed to by the commission. I believe this rule is far too strict and would inhibit accountable government.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this correction and addendum to my testimony of August 13.