

STATE OF KANSAS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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3131 CR 2600
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DOUG BLEX
12TH DISTRICT

Chairman Longbine and Members of the Senate Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee:

Thank you for the privilege of supporting HB2198 allowing Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) law enforcement personnel to affiliate with the Kansas Police and Fireman's Retirement (KP&F) System. KDWP state law enforcement officers are one of the few law enforcement officers who are not included in KP&F. KDWP officers are full-time certified law enforcement officers and work each day as state-wide officers like Kansas Highway Patrol, who have long been members of the KP&F.

The KDWP law enforcement officers routinely make arrests, testify in court, conduct investigations, partner with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. Many times, local KDWP officers are the first on the scene to respond to emergency situations. This is especially frequent in our rural counties.

I retired as a certified state law enforcement officer from KDWP. I can enlighten you on the frequent number of times that I, as well as other KDWP officers, are put into life-threatening situations. It is amazing the number of contacts with wanted felons KDWP officers have on isolated riverbanks at night. I am still in awe when I pass a traffic stop along the highway and see 2-4 vehicles with flashing red and blue lights and multiple officers serving as backup. One of my most memorable encounters was an incident responding to a landowner complaint in the middle of a cold December night confronting 3 individuals, all three of whom were armed, which resulted in an arrest and my backup and transport was needed and this was all within a 30 minute timeframe! These types of incidents are still occurring today, especially in our rural areas. These situations are very stressful to the officers.

Those officers working in our state parks will see their parks grow to the size of medium-sized cities during holiday weekends. Those large influxes of people bring drugs, alcohol, traffic, boating and domestic problems to officers. I have worked those weekends when people have worked several months and finally get to relax but many do not want to comply with local laws. KDWP officers respond to boating accidents and generally provide primary recovery efforts for drownings. It can be, and is, very stressful to the officers.

The overall intent of the KP&F retirement fund is the realization that law enforcement and all emergency response positions are frequently in high stress situations that can lead to PTSD and other serious health issues. This bill would also allow for the officer to transition out of law enforcement at an earlier age and protect the officer from physical confrontations at a later age. The KP&F retirement system allows officers in those high stress situations to contribute additional funds to a full retirement system based on a shorter work time.

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The law enforcement community finds itself in an unprecedented position, where the number of applicants shrink, while the number of vacancies increase. That is certainly true for KDWP recruiting and retaining quality law enforcement officers. The ability to achieve full KP&F retirement in a shorter time frame is certainly a great incentive to recruit and retain officers.

I respectfully ask that you join me in support of HB2198 and pass this bill favorably out of committee. This is simply the right thing to do!

Respectfully,

Doug Blex, State Representative, House District 12