

Proponent-In-Person Testimony on HB 2114

It is my pleasure to submit testimony in support of renaming the Joint Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice the J. Russell "Russ" Jennings Joint Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice. Many of you may not know but I served as the Deputy Commissioner for Legislative and Public Affairs and Community Programs for two previous Commissioners including Russ. There are so many things one could say about Russ and his contributions to the State of Kansas but there is no one who can claim a broader reach in the field of corrections. From law enforcement, to the bench, to serving on the task force which created the Juvenile Justice Authority, to becoming Commissioner of Juvenile Justice, to being a member of the Kansas House of Representatives. Russ not only served admirably in all of these roles, but he served with a heart for the people of Kansas and with the unrelenting hope that after consequences were served that it was our duty to give people the opportunity to improve themselves to allow them to be a benefit to the state.

I could tell many Russ stories, like the time he was creating his first PowerPoint and my critique elicited a response of "you sound just like my daughter" to which I replied "she must be really smart, so get to editing." To the times that we had serious policy discussions about the deferment of Medicaid dollars for the juvenile justice out of home placement system at the time, to having to close two juvenile correctional facilities and deal with the transitions that resulted from those closures, to the implementation of the first evidenced based assessment system for youth in Kansas the YLS-CMI, to the horrible tragedies that sometimes occurred with youth in the system. Russ always handled situations with great care, study, doing what he would want for his child, and with the hope that with the right supports youth could find a better path. Russ not only impacted juvenile justice and corrections in Kansas but also across the country with his work related to accreditation for correctional facilities through PbS. I can think of no one more deserving of this honor. He loved his family first, his work, and this state. I know he would be truly humbled and honored to have this committee named in his honor.

Heather Morgan