

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2448
Presented to the Senate Committee on Judiciary

By: Matt Huntsman

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Chair Longbine, Vice Chair Billinger, Ranking Member Rogers and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Matthew R. Huntsman, with the law firm of Bukaty, Aubry & Huntsman, Chartered. I am here today representing the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 64, whose members are parole officers. My testimony is in support of House Bill 2448, with requested modification and clarification that I will explain.

House Bill 2448 was introduced with the purpose of providing security officers within the Kansas Department of Corrections (“KDOC”) membership in the Kansas Police and Fire Retirement System (“KP&F”). The bill as written provides for several positions within the classified service to now be included in KP&F. As currently written, the bill proposes that only “security officers” as defined in subsection (h) be included in KP&F. That subsection does not explicitly include parole officers. However, subsection (h)(4) states that any employee of the Department of Corrections “who is in any position for which the duties and responsibilities directly and primarily involve the operation of the correctional industries activity of the department of corrections within a correctional institution or juvenile correctional facility and involve regular contact with inmates or juvenile offenders” shall be included.

The positions of Parole Officer I and Parole Officer II are intimately related to the operation of the correctional industries, as well as the activity within correctional institutions.

According to the KDOC job description for Parole Officer I, parole officers maintain case plans to reintegrate offenders into the community. Parole officers also conduct pre-parole investigations to determine proposed parole plans. This includes periodic visits to correctional facilities. Likewise, the job description for Parole Officer II states that parole officers must assist offenders in the development of release plans, while also managing a caseload of offenders who are reintegrating into the community. Undoubtedly, these activities directly involve the operation of the correctional industries. Moreover, these two positions are part of the classified service, just as those enumerated in the bill.

Despite the language of the bill suggesting that parole officers be included, those positions are not explicitly included anywhere in subsection (h). Parole officers serve an integral purpose with the KDOC. The National Institute of Justice has found a high rate of recidivism among offenders. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, over two-thirds (67.8%) of offenders are rearrested within three years of release.¹ That number eclipses three-quarters (76.6%) within five years.² To combat this return to crime, parole officers must develop release plans and assist offenders in becoming productive members of society. It is imperative that offenders receive this assistance from parole officers. As such, it is important to retain parole officers that possess the requisite skills to assist parolees reintegrating into society. Including parole officers in KP&F will likely reduce turnover rates and retain the most skilled officers in those positions.

¹ *Recidivism*, National Institute of Justice (January 31, 2018), <https://www.nij.gov/topics/corrections/recidivism/Pages/welcome.aspx>.

² *Id.*

I respectfully request consideration that House Bill 2448 be amended to explicitly include the positions of Parole Officer I and Parole Officer II. These are my suggested amendments to provide clarification:

(h) As used in this section, "security officer" means any person, as certified to the board by the secretary of corrections, who is employed on or after the effective date of this act as an employee of the department of corrections:

...

(7) who is in the job class of Parole Officer I and Parole Officer II, as all such job classes are described on July 1, 2018, in the state job classification plan in effect for the classified service under the Kansas Civil Service Act or who is in a position in any successor job class or classes that have been approved under K.S.A. 75-2938.

These amendments will make clear that parole officers are included in KP&F along with the other job classes discussed in the bill. The Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge 64, respectfully requests that the above proposed language be included in HB 2448.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and for your consideration. I am pleased to answer any questions.