



TESTIMONY

IN SUPPORT OF HB 2165

HOUSE FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 25, 2019

Chairman Kelly and Members of the House Financial Institutions and Pensions Committee,

My name is Sarah LaFrenz, and I am the President of the Kansas Organization of State Employees (KOSE). KOSE is the largest labor union in the State of Kansas representing Executive Branch employees. KOSE represents 7,377 State of Kansas employees and 1,742 corrections officers and counselors. I appreciate this opportunity to testify in support of HB 2165.

We would like to commend Rep. Delperdang, and the other 19 sponsors, for introducing HB 2165, which would provide for membership in the Kansas Police and Firemen's Retirement System (KP&F) for security officers of the Kansas Department of Corrections. We believe it is important to allow law enforcement professionals, who provide important service in order to keep our citizens and communities safe, appropriate retirement benefit opportunities.

Our Corrections Officers do a fine job of making the state prison facilities operate in a professional manner under very trying circumstances working long hours for little pay. As recently indicated by Corrections Secretary Roger Werholtz, the Department and its' employees are operating under extremely difficult conditions.

As I have indicated in previous testimony to this committee, recent events clearly illustrate the state's correctional system is at a serious tipping point regarding staffing levels. Providing this enhanced retirement benefit would go a long way to improving morale and retaining and recruiting good employees. It will also send a clear message that the Legislature is serious about addressing this critical issue.

KP&F members generally can retire with a full benefit at a younger age. Corrections officer workplaces are unique and dangerous, and we appreciate the effort this proposal makes to recognize this fact. While moving current and future corrections officers into a new retirement plan will help make the job more attractive, we encourage the legislature to also address other important factors that also drive high turnover including low wages and inadequate worker protections.

The idea of moving State Corrections Officers into KP&F is long-overdue. As you may recall, during the 2018 Kansas Legislative Session, the Kansas House of Representatives on several oc-

casions advanced the concept over to the Senate. The bill originally passed the House on February 21, 2018 on a Final Action vote of 113-9. Unfortunately, the measure did not make it to the Governor's desk.

While there is not a current fiscal note yet published for moving Corrections Officers under KP&F, the fiscal impact of last year's bill was modest in relation to the overall budget. I ask you — what price is too high to ensure the safety of our citizens, our communities and our dedicated state corrections officers?

It is also worth mentioning that the 2018 Joint Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice Oversight recommended in its' report to the 2019 Legislature that this change for facility correction officers be made.

With all the above in mind, I sincerely hope you will consider the merits of moving State Corrections Officers into KP&F and recommend favorable passage of HB 2165. I would be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time. Thank you for considering my testimony.

The Kansas Organization of State Employees (KOSE) is a union for executive branch state employees, and the largest union of state employees in Kansas. All non-supervisory, non-confidential employees in the executive branch of Kansas state government (exclusive of higher education) are eligible to join KOSE. KOSE is local 300 - dually affiliated with both AFT and AFSCME. info@koseunion.org