

# Kansas Peace Officers' Association



INCORPORATED

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## Testimony to the Senate Commerce Committee

In Support of SB491

February 21, 2022

Chair Erickson and Committee Members:

The Kansas Peace Officers' Association represents over 3,000 law enforcement officers within the State of Kansas from urban and rural communities and including municipal, county, and state law enforcement agencies. Our Association is in strong support of this bill.

Officer wellness, including not only physical but mental wellness, has become a growing concern receiving a large amount of attention and resources. These efforts have resulted in tremendous progress through improved training, awareness, and programming to assure officers can face their daily risks to both physical and psychological trauma they encounter in carrying out their required duties.

This bill will move Kansas forward on this issue in a significant way. The first step in addressing Post Traumatic Stress in our first responders is providing strong reassurance we have their back and will support them through this emotional trauma as surely as we will support them if they incur a physical injury. There is no way first responders can conduct their work and avoid the effects of the extreme traumatic events they encounter. We can prepare them for it, we can offer programs to help them when the stress they incur is getting too much to bear, but we have no choice to just turn and go the other way when going into or encountering an expected or unexpected traumatic event.

But we can demonstrate support with firm commitments to help them recover if these traumatic stresses develop into diagnosed levels reaching Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This is the level where the effects interfere with life functions over a period of time. It is that level of Post Traumatic Stress addressed in this bill. Many of us in law enforcement, and other frontline emergency services, will and have encountered Post Traumatic Stress. Fortunately, most of us will be able to address it through our support mechanisms and new programs being put into place without missing work. But a few won't, and it is for those that this bill exists.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is not an incurable ailment. Many of those reaching this advanced stage of Post Traumatic Stress can still be treated and return to work. But they need time and resources to get the treatment without piling on more trauma related stress on top of what already exists. Time and resources they currently will receive to recover from physical injury. Just as in physical injuries, the goal of this bill is to provide the time and treatment to

return the employee to work. And just as in physical injuries, we know sometimes the injury is too severe and they will not recover sufficiently to be able to perform their duties. This bill is also for them.

By moving this bill forward, you will be demonstrating that you have our first responders' backs. That you are willing to put into place safeguards to assure they will have the time and resources to recover and return to their chosen service to the people of Kansas. But most importantly this bill will send a message through their employers that we recognize PTSD as a job-related risk and we are willing to do what it takes to provide the best opportunity for the employee to recover and return to their profession.

Two of our border states have joined the growing list of states that have made this recognition of PTSD and passed laws to allow their work comp system to support these first responders. In 2017 Colorado passed legislation and in 2020 Nebraska passed legislation. It is time for Kansas to join them.

Please move this bill forward favorably.

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