



Public Health
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Unified Government Public Health Department

619 Ann Avenue, Kansas City, KS 66101-3038

Phone (913) 573-8855

wycokck.org/health

Proponent Testimony :: HB 2028

Wesley McKain with the Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, KS Public Health Department

House Committee on Judiciary • January 25, 2023

Chairman Patton and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to supply testimony to this committee in support of HB 2028, which requires criminal records to be automatically expunged in cases of acquittal, dismissal, and diversion.

I speak on behalf of the Public Health Department in Wyandotte County, but I also speak on behalf of the larger Unified Government of which we belong. The Board of Commissioners adopted the state policy goal of automating expungement into our 2023 Legislative Agenda.

The Unified Government of WYCO/KCK Public Health Department (UGPHD) is committed to addressing the social determinants of health and their impacts on community members. Access to a decent paying job is one of the major deciding factors as to whether an individual or a family can afford food, transportation and healthcare. It is an essential component of a healthy community. The existence of a criminal record is often a barrier to obtaining such a job.

Evidence shows that having your criminal record expunged has an impact on your household income. A study out of New York showed that a criminal record reduces a job seeker's chance of getting a callback or job offer by nearly 50 percent. Another study by the University of Michigan showed that people whose eligible crimes were expunged *saw a 13% increase in odds of being employed and a 22% increase in their annual income within the first year.*

The expungement process helps ensure ex-offenders get a real second chance. At issue are the difficulties people face is navigating the expungement process. **Nationally, it is estimated that only 10% of those eligible for expungement actually complete the process.** HB2028 takes an important first step in automating this process for non-convictions.

The timing of this legislation is crucial. The state of Kansas is currently implementing new technology that will make records easily searchable through an online portal. Potential employers only need to complete a simple internet search to disqualify candidates. Those whose cases were dismissed or acquitted should not be unfairly disqualified for a job for a crime of which they were never convicted.

Wyandotte County consistently ranks poorly in health outcomes in the state of Kansas and we believe HB 2028 is one piece of the puzzle that will allow us to improve health outcomes for



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some of the most vulnerable people in our county. Access to well paying jobs is so critical to health! Yet these benefits extend well beyond Wyandotte County, and will help individuals in similar circumstances across Kansas.

You will see from the proponent testimony that criminal justice reform advocates, members of the criminal justice system, and businesses alike appreciate the benefits of this legislation. This is a rare win-win-win and we are excited to see the benefits to many sectors and individuals that this legislation will bring.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

Wesley McKain

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Wesley McKain

Policy & Development Manager

Unified Government of Wyandotte County Public Health Department