

Written **PROPONENT** testimony for SB 431 directing the capitol preservation committee to approve plans for a memorial honoring Emil Joseph Kapaun.

To: Representative Ronald Ellis, Chairman, Kansas House Committee on Veterans and Military

From: Scott Carter, Coordinator for the Father Kapaun Guild

Date: March 5, 2024

Chairman Ellis and members of the Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee:

Thank you for your service to the people of our State, and for allowing me to provide this written testimony in support of SB 431.

As coordinator of the Father Kapaun Guild, I have the unique perspective of witnessing the impact that Chaplain Kapaun's life continues to effect over 70 years after his death. In fact, rather than dying with him in North Korea, his legacy spreads and grows among people of all faiths and political persuasions. One snapshot that I would like to focus on is the homecoming, funeral and burial that took place in September, 2021 after the identification of his remains earlier that year.

Several facts attest to this impact:

- From the outset, we had nothing but 100% support from the office of the Mayor and City Manager in Wichita, as well as the Sheriff's Office, Wichita Police Department, and EMS, not to mention those of Marion County. All effort was given to provide the smooth transfer of his remains with police escort, as well as military honors in downtown Wichita.
- A capacity crowd of over 5,000 people attended his funeral Mass at Hartman Arena north of Wichita, and thousands more gathered to pay their respects as he was processed to the Cathedral to his final resting place.
- Members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division from Fort Riley, as well as the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division- Chaplain Kapaun's unit while serving in Korea- from Fort Hood, Texas assisted as casket bearers for military honors.
- A horse and caisson team travelled from San Antonio to assist in the burial.
- The Army sent advisors from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division out of Arlington National Cemetery to assist in training.
- American Airlines provided transport and honors pro bono at stops from Hawaii to Kansas
- Tens of thousands watched the funeral streaming online and on television.
- News of the identification and events were picked up by most major national news outlets: the Associated Press, CBS, ABC, the Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, US News, Fox News, and The Hill, with a particularly moving tribute by MSNBC anchor Rachel Maddow.
- Gov. Laura Kelly proclaimed September 29, 2021, the date of his funeral and burial, as Father Emil Kapaun Day for the State of Kansas.

Thousands visit places related to his life each year, from his grave in Wichita to his hometown of Pilsen and the Chaplain Kapaun Museum located there. Thousands more from all 50 States and many different countries reach out online for information and express how the example of Chaplain Kapaun touches their lives. A photo of Chaplain Kapaun is included in the Korean War

Memorial in Washington, DC, as well as the Presidio in San Francisco. He is memorialized by a chapel at Fort Riley, Kapaun Air Station in Germany, as well as with a monument at Camp Humphreys, South Korea, the largest overseas US military installation in the world. He is featured in several different museums. Chaplain Kapaun's enduring message is one of hope, courage, perseverance and love that crosses all spectrums. I am confident that his story will live on and continue to inspire future generations of Kansas, and so I ask the committee to support this endeavor to memorialize Chaplain Kapaun at the heart of our State capital.

Thank you again for your time and your service to the people of our State.

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