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TESTIMONY

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Testimony of Chief of Police Norman Williams, City of Wichita

Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present supportive arguments for SB135 on behalf of the Wichita Police Department, the City of Wichita, and the Kansas Association of Chiefs of Police, all of whom support legislation proposed under SB 135.

It is a well known adage in law enforcement that 5% of society creates 95% of the crime. It seems there are certain people in society who literally try to "make a living" out of crime. Instead of looking for work or improving their education, these people spend their time selling drugs, committing fraud, stealing identities, committing robbery, or running with gangs. Some commit all of the above crimes.

We have reached a point in law enforcement and in this State that we must become more efficient with our time and resources due to budget constraints. Law enforcement can no longer afford randomization in how we do business – our work must become more focused and efficient. We must work to remove "career" criminals from the street who account for 95% of crime in our towns and cities.

No one wants to create laws that will simply fill prison beds. The valuable resource of a prison bed should be filled with violent criminals and those who choose to make "a living" committing crime in our communities. Our current laws regarding murderers and violent criminals are sufficient. The proposed SB 135 will allow us to more successfully prosecute those who have chosen to make crime their "career".

In the middle of 2006, the Wichita Police Department discovered a group of criminals involved in the Neighborhood CRIPS gang who were committing crimes such as drug and gun sales, Medicaid fraud, robbery, human trafficking, aggravated assault, and others. When investigators reviewed the criminal history of this group, it became clear they were looking at a criminal enterprise.

Senate Judiciary
2-17-11
Attachment 11

In other words, we saw multiple and repeated trips into the criminal justice system for this group accompanied with sporadic incarceration times, probation, and parole. After each of these trips into the justice system, they went right back to the business of committing crimes for the gang. Based on this information, we decided to use this historical information and attempt new prosecution under federal racketeering laws.

Because there was no State law for us to use, the Wichita Police Department had to get a federal law enforcement entity to "adopt" the case and run all documents and paperwork through. The FBI agreed to do this. In years 2006 and 2007, the investigation federally indicted over 28 individuals who were involved in the criminal enterprise. Every single one of these suspects had lengthy criminal records and had received multiple chances in the criminal justice system. Despite this, they chose to purposely continue lives of crime.

By indicting these suspects under the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act (RICO), we were able remove these subjects from the street, present to a judge their total criminal history and continued involvement in crime, and gain enhanced prison sentences which removed them from the city streets. This effort tangibly reduced street crimes committed by the CRIPS gang organization, saving lives and property as well as reducing the amount of time required to deal with these crimes.

Many of our cities and counties in the State of Kansas do not have the access to the federal system that was available to Wichita. Under SB 135, we would have a state remedy to deal with our recidivist criminals who operate in all areas of our State. Local law enforcement would no longer need federal "adoption" and could be more efficient in conducting these investigations through our local courts. This proposed law would also send a clear message to the criminals of this State that "career" criminals need to pay heed. It also sends a message to all law abiding citizens that this State is going to aggressively protect their safety.