



Kansas Press Association, Inc.

Dedicated to serving and advancing the interests of Kansas newspapers

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March 15, 2017

To: Sen. Rick Wilborn, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and committee members

From: Doug Anstaett, executive director, Kansas Press Association

Re: HB 2070

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I am Doug Anstaett, executive director of the Kansas Press Association. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our newspaper association's opposition to language in House Bill 2070 which would mandate confidentiality for records in the central registry of all Kansas law enforcement officers.

I've not been able to ascertain just what is driving this legislation, but any time the closing of records is discussed, our ears perk up at KPA and at the other associations that deal with such issues. While our laws stipulate quite clearly that closure of information of interest to the public should be the absolute last resort, it is often the only alternative proposed. We believe that is the case here.

The Lawrence Journal-World has had a series of articles in the six weeks about a subject that gets to the heart of this issue and why we oppose any attempt to shield law enforcement officers from appropriate public inquiry. While we have a great deal of respect for what our law enforcement officers do to protect citizens, we believe they should be subject to similar scrutiny faced by other public officials.

In Lawrence, several incidents have been reported over the past month about former police officers who left that police department under questionable circumstances, yet were not necessarily disqualified from serving other Kansas communities.

For example, since 2014, at least four former Lawrence police officers have been accused of violence against others. Yet the Journal-World reports three of those officers remain certified with CPOST. Two were accused of battery while another was arrested on suspicion of felony kidnapping, aggravated battery, aggravated assault, domestic battery and criminal threat. That officer is no longer with the department but at the time of the story remained certified, according to CPOST. He is now suing the city of Lawrence.

Something is not right when cities and counties prefer to whitewash a law enforcement officer's transgressions rather than report them truthfully and fully to CPOST.

Frankly, we are amazed by how little of this information is sought or shared between elected officials who make these important decisions.

Our attorneys have been working with the revisor's office and other legislators to try to fix this legislation. You'll hear about some of their work today.

The original language constituted nothing short of overkill. We hope a satisfactory compromise can be reached that serves all parties: law enforcement, communities and the citizens of Kansas.

Thank you.