

CALVIN H. HAYDEN
SHERIFF



DOUGLAS G. BEDFORD
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Written Testimony to the Senate Committee on Judiciary in Support of SB45 February 6, 2019

Chariman Wilborn and Committee Members,

I am writing today in support of SB45 and to represent the men and women of the Johnson County Sheriff's Office, and most importantly, Master Deputy Brandon Collins.

On September 11th, 2016, my whole world changed. It began with the frantic radio calls of a dispatcher checking on a deputy who I knew was on a traffic stop. Shortly thereafter, I learned the Overland Park Police Department was receiving calls about a fire and explosion which possibly involved Master Deputy Brandon Collins. Brandon wasn't answering his radio or his phone.

I raced to his location as fast as my patrol vehicle would travel. I feared the worst, but prayed he was only injured and could not communicate at the time. Upon arrival, I saw my close friend and colleague's body was severely maimed and burned beyond recognition. It is a scene that I will never be able to erase from my mind.

Even now, the loss of Brandon and the concern I share for his family are constantly on my mind. I was fortunate that my last conversation with Brandon was about three hours before his death. We spoke about family, past experiences together, and even made plans for the future. Had I known it was going to be the last time we spoke, I would have said so much more.

Brandon was an amazing person. He was kind, extremely funny, humble and inquisitive. He took his professional responsibilities seriously, and always strived to be the best. Brandon was the only friend I have ever had that I can honestly say I never had a quarrel with. The day after his death someone told me these type of tragedies always seem to happen to the best people. In this instance, that was definitely the case.

Brandon left behind his beloved wife Traci, who was his high school sweetheart, and their two wonderful daughters, Ashlee and Lily. Brandon's father, William "Bill" Collins, shared a close bond with his son and undoubtedly helped make Brandon the man he was. Bill was retired, but spent his adult life as a teacher, coach, principal and superintendent. Unfortunately, Bill suddenly passed away exactly seven weeks after, and nearly to the hour of Brandon's death. Bill's family and pastor know he died from a broken heart. Their entire family is still learning to cope with Brandon's tragic and senseless loss. I believe there is an emptiness for those that knew and loved Brandon, one that will never be able to be filled.

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Along my personal journey of learning to cope with Brandon's death, I have had many experiences, both good and bad. One of the best occurred at a training class I attended in 2017. The class was presented by Sergeant Don Egdorf with the Houston TX Police Department. During the class, Sergeant Egdorf played a video he produced, titled, "End of Watch: The Kevin Will Story" (Available to view on YouTube). The video documents Houston Police Officer Kevin Will, who was killed by a drunk driver, and the impact Kevin's loss has brought to his family, the Houston Police Department, and everyone involved in the case. I was first struck by how similar Kevin and Brandon's deaths were. Both were viciously killed while on-duty, working on a highway, and by an illegal immigrant drunk driver. I was then shocked by how much more severely the State of Texas deals with such crimes. Kevin's killer was convicted and sentenced to 55 years in prison. In comparison, Brandon's killer received a sentence of merely 12 years and 6 months for convictions of 2nd degree Murder (Reckless) and three counts of DUI Aggravated Battery. There is a strong possibility Brandon's killer won't even serve the full sentence.

Sergeant Egdorf was very open and honest about the personal and professional struggles he has faced since Kevin's death. I realized how much we had in common and sought him out after class. Sadly, Sergeant Egdorf and I do share many of the same struggles, but I am happy to announce these tragedies brought us together and we have since become friends.

One struggle Don and I don't share is the lack of appropriate justice. I am as disgusted today as the day Brandon's killer received such a light sentence. I could write many pages of my thoughts on this issue, but I think I can simply say, I feel it is time the State of Kansas better protects those who protect us. I pray if a similar tragedy occurs in the future, a true sense of justice can be felt by the family, friends, co-workers and the community of those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

I want to sincerely thank you for your time and consideration, and I urge you to approve this legislation.

Respectfully,

Sergeant Christopher Mills
Johnson County Sheriff's Office