



Kansas State Lodge

Fraternal Order of Police

Testimony on House Bill 2509
House Committee on Insurance and Pensions

Presented by
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and
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Kansas State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police

February 9, 2022

Chairperson Johnson and members of the Committee, I am Matt Blassingame, the Chief Steward at the Topeka Police Department, Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 3. The coauthor of this testimony, Deputy Darrin Marr, Chief Steward at the Shawnee County Sheriff's Department, Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 3, is unable to attend.

I will offer our testimony representing the Kansas State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police, which is the largest fraternal police organization in Kansas with over 4,200 members. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today in support of House Bill 2509.

We are all aware that there is a severe shortage of qualified job applicants in the United States. Law enforcement agencies across the nation, including Kansas, are not immune from unprecedented recruitment challenges and are facing a personnel crisis while struggling to recruit, hire, and retain police officers.

For example, the Topeka Police Department has 28 vacant law enforcement positions and projections indicate approximately 30% of the sworn Topeka Police Department law enforcement officers are retirement-eligible in the next 5 years.

Even more startling, it is estimated that within the next 12 months, 30% of the sworn law enforcement officers at the Shawnee County Sheriff's Department are retirement eligible. This represents between eight and nine hundred years of combined law enforcement experience.

Simply put, the outflow of law enforcement officers retiring is very high, while at the same time, the number of law enforcement academy graduates is decreasing. If law enforcement agencies continue to lose officers without bringing in a number of qualified recruits to replace them, communities will soon begin to feel the effects.

The Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP) is currently only available to state employee members of the Kansas Police and Fire (KP&F) retirement at the Kansas Highway Patrol and Kansas Bureau of Investigation. I understand it has been a useful tool in retaining some law enforcement personnel.

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House Bill 2509 would permit expansion of DROP to include any member of the Kansas Police and Fire retirement system administered by KPERS and would allow local city and county law enforcement agencies the option to offer DROP, which may help reduce the number of law enforcement officers retiring and somewhat ease the looming retirement crunch.

As a point of information, the City of Wichita operates its own pension system and is not part of KPERS. The Police & Fire Retirement System of Wichita, Kansas covers all commissioned police officers and firefighter employees of the City of Wichita. They operate a successful DROP that has helped retain law enforcement officers.

DROP will not be the ultimate solution to end the loss of retiring law enforcement officers. However, DROP will be a human resource tool to appropriately relieve some pressure from the quickly thinning law enforcement ranks.

As an example, Deputy Marr, at age 52, will soon be retirement eligible. If DROP were expanded to include local law enforcement agencies, Deputy Marr might be favorably inclined to remain in law enforcement. With his 23 years of training and experience, this would be beneficial to the community, the Sheriff's Office, and Deputy Marr.

Employee retention is one of the most critical issues facing law enforcement organizations today, and it is important to retain highly trained and well-qualified employees. Permitting local city and county law enforcement agencies, the option to offer DROPs will reduce the turnover of seasoned law enforcement personnel.

We strongly support the passage of House Bill 2509.

Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing my testimony, and at the appropriate time, I am pleased to answer your questions.