



*March 17, 2022*

*Testimony In Support of House Bill 2515*

*Submitted by Patrick Armstrong, Project Manager, The Council of State Governments Justice Center*

Thank you to Chair Warren and the committee for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill (HB) 2515, a bill that would allow people struggling with addiction to have an opportunity to pursue more stable productive lives by providing them the chance to be removed from the offender registry which currently hinders their recovery in many ways.

This topic was discussed and supported by the Kansas Criminal Justice Reform Commission as part of its work to increase public safety, better manage expensive criminal justice system costs, and give people a chance to recover from addiction. The Commission's Proportionality Subcommittee discussed ways to appropriately punish people for criminal behavior but also find ways to ensure that the punishment fits the crime. I had the pleasure of working closely with this subcommittee for the last two and a half years as they thoughtfully worked on policy recommendations to make Kansas a safer place.

Challenges with addiction have put pressure on every level of the criminal justice system and responses like the current registration requirements have created a barrier for citizens, making it more of a hurdle for them to recover despite research that says registries like the one in question do not lead to lower rates of recidivism or increased public safety.<sup>i</sup>

Kansas is an outlier nationally because they are one of a small minority of states that even have a registry for people convicted of drug offenses (along with about five other states). This makes struggling with addiction, which is a challenge no matter where someone lives, even harder in Kansas than in most places in the rest of country.

Studies have shown that registries like this one can lead to adverse consequences and keep people from establishing stable lives.<sup>ii</sup> And since people can just search names in a public database it is easy for potential employers and landlords, for example, to find someone and deny them housing and job opportunities, effectively punishing them again for a crime which they've already served their sentence and paid their debt to society.

The Commission expressed a desire to eliminate barriers for people with addiction to help them get their lives on track, support their families, and reintegrate into their communities. HB 2515 opens the door for people to be removed from the existing drug offender registry, so that they

might have a better chance for rehabilitation. For these reasons, I hope the committee will vote in favor of advancing HB 2515.

Sincerely,

Patrick Armstrong

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<sup>i</sup> Zgoba, K., Wesley, J. G., & Salerno, L. M. (2018). Megan's Law 20 Years Later: An Empirical Analysis and Policy Review. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, Vol 45, No. 7, 1028-1046.

<sup>ii</sup> Zevitz, R. G., Crim, D., & Farkas, M. A. (2000b). Sex offender community notification: Managing high-risk criminals or exacting further vengeance? *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 18, 375-391.