

Testimony on House Bill 2165

To

The Joint Committee on Pensions, Investments and Benefits

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Kansas Department of Corrections
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The Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC) would like to thank the members of the Committee for this opportunity to contribute to your consideration of House Bill (HB) 2165. We are a proponent of this change for our employees.

Much like the members of the House of Representatives who proposed HB2165, we regularly hear concerns from our employees in regard to their compensation. Those concerns are commonly expressed about pay rates, health insurance costs, and retirement. These concerns were recently measured in an employee survey where they told us that our highest priority needs to be to ensure employees are reasonably compensated in pay & benefits for the work they do. This was expressed at nearly double the rate of the second highest priority of providing equipment, technology & training needed. We also learned in that survey that 66% of our employees would like to finish their public service career with the Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC). So clearly, retirement benefits matter to our workforce.

The employees of the KDOC who have regular contact with offenders, juvenile and adult, within an institution and in the community, are similar to employees currently provided retirement benefits under KP&F in ways that include:

- Shift work. The demands of serving the public twenty-four hours a day require our employees to work shifts in the same manner as police/sheriff officers and fire/first responder personnel in the community
- Exposure to violent people. Just as our fellow public servants in the community are, our staff are working with the most dangerous citizens of our State. A case can be made that our staff have greater intensity of exposure as they are continually in contact in the confined setting of a correctional facility. Different than in the community where law enforcement also interacts for portions of their day with those of us who are not criminal justice involved and simply need help with a traffic accident, a health crisis, or other emergencies.
- Risk of injury or death. Like our peers in the community, our workforce must respond situations that are life threatening and do so willingly, knowing they made a career choice which presents these risks.

These employees of KDOC, should be allowed to associate with the KP&F plan. As currently proposed, our Parole staff are excluded from the HB2165 definition of a security officer, and we would encourage that they be included as well.

If HB2165 were enacted as proposed, every person employed by KDOC as a security officer would become affiliated with KP&F, leaving no persons in the current Corrections group for future comparison.

I'll close by offering that improving the benefits package for KDOC employees is a worthwhile investment. Our employees are the only public servants engaged directly, and daily, in the challenging work of changing behavior of our highest risk citizens who are, or have been, in prison. Our peers who are currently in KP&F play a vital role in our public safety system, but KDOC employees work to change those behaviors so that the demands upon others, and the safety of us all, are improved. An investment to bring them to an equal level in terms of retirement benefits is a good investment in attracting and retaining quality employees to engage in this vital work.

I thank you for your dedication of time to consider HB2165 and we hope to be a resource to you as that work continues.