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Testimony to Senate Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee

In Support of HB2198

March 8, 2023

Chairman Longbine and Committee Members:

Our associations support HB2198 placing the law enforcement officers of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism under the Kansas Police and Fire Retirement System. These Kansas law enforcement officers face the same risks and challenges as other law enforcement officers in our state. They are certified by the Commission on Police Officers and Standards the same as every other law enforcement officer in the state. They make car stops and confront unknown risks as they work to keep Kansans safe. Their work goes beyond just fish and game laws. They patrol our state parks and camping areas responding to calls of all types of criminal violations.

In our rural areas all law enforcement officers work closely together frequently backing each other on calls and enforcement activities. KDWPT officers provide backup for our rural deputies and our rural deputies provide backup to them. This is critical, especially in the rural areas where the density of law enforcement is low and back up may be many miles and minutes away. The KDWPT officers often are also called on to assist when we need expertise or equipment unique to waterways and other areas of their typical public safety efforts. These often involve searching for a missing person, recovering accident victims, and assisting in locating victims and evidence of violent crimes.

There are three main bodies of state law enforcement officers in Kansas: The Highway Patrol, The KBI, and the KDWPT enforcement officers. Each have several commonalities: 1) they are state certified law enforcement officers meeting the same certification standards and training requirements, 2) while certified and trained to perform all the same law enforcement functions, they each have their specialty area, and 3) they often work together between themselves and with local law enforcement to protect the safety of the people living in and visiting our state. But one distinct difference is that only the KDWPT is excluded from the benefits of KP&F membership. KP&F recognizes that law enforcement is a unique career that is often called upon to perform physically demanding tasks. It recognizes a need for an earlier retirement age as these public servants' physical abilities begin to decline and the emotional and physical risks of a law enforcement career.

It is time for the state to recognize the importance of the KDWPT officers in the overall integrated law enforcement efforts of this state and to allow them the same benefits of the KP&F retirement system. We encourage you to move this bill forward favorably.

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