

CASEY SLAUGHTER
PRESIDENT

AMANDA WOOD
VICE PRESIDENT



JOHN RYAN
SECRETARY

NICK HALLS
TREASURER

KANSAS STATE LODGE FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

477 NORTH SENECA STREET, WICHITA, KANSAS 67203
316-302-4982

**Testimony in Support of
House Bill 2198
Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Insurance
Ryan Smidt, State Trustee
Fraternal Order of Police, Lodge 59 Kansas State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police
March 8, 2023**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about HB 2198, which would allow certain Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks law enforcement personnel to participate in the Kansas police and fireman's retirement system.

My name is Ryan Smidt I am a State Trustee of Lodge 59 of the Kansas Fraternal Order of Police. I am a Natural Resource Officer and have been with the Department for 25 years. I appear in support of the bill.

HB 2198 would allow full-time law enforcement certified employees within KDWP's Law Enforcement, Parks, and Public Lands divisions to transition into KPF from the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System (KPERS).

This will greatly enhance the Department's efforts with recruitment and retention of personnel. Currently, officers with the Department are placed into Tier 3 KPERS Retirement. This retirement system requires newly hired law enforcement officers to work until the age of 65 to be eligible for retirement. Law enforcement work is a physically and mentally demanding career path, especially for those officers who work for KDWP's. The Department's law enforcement staff is currently realizing approximately a 20% vacancy rate. This is because qualified applicants, can choose to apply and opt to work for other law enforcement agencies that offer better pay and KPF retirement.

Natural Resource Officers of the KDWP's, are "Police Officers." Kansas statutes prescribe we have statewide authority and jurisdiction to enforce Kansas laws and make arrests for violations of the law. KDWP's officers are fully certified and commissioned law enforcement officers who follow Kansas CPOST requirements.

KDWP's law enforcement officers typically work alone in remote areas with back up officers a long distance away. We provide public safety and enforce criminal laws on department lands and deal with violations of state law, from simple compliance checks and citations to making arrests for DUIs, BUIs, or violations of criminal laws—examples of such are: illegal use of serious drugs,



domestic battery, and arrests for felony violations. KDWP's officers are also the state's water patrol authority; during the summer, they are the cops on Kansas' many rivers and lakes. They are responsible for providing not only enforcement of safety rules but are also first responders, helping other police, fire, and EMS agencies with support for search and rescue missions and recovering victims from water related deaths.

We routinely work alongside aiding federal, state and local law enforcement agencies including the Kansas Highway Patrol and Kansas Bureau of Investigation of which both agencies provide their law enforcement personnel with KPF retirement.

Allowing full-time law enforcement certified employees within KDWP's Law Enforcement, Parks, and Public Lands divisions to transition into KPF from the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System (KPERS) will provide equitable retirement plans between state agency law enforcement officers.

Thank you for allowing my testimony and I am pleased to answer any questions at the appropriate time.