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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Neutral Testimony for HB2781
March 3, 2026

William (Bill) Turner
Executive Director, Kansas Office of Veterans Services

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present written neutral testimony regarding HB 2781.

The Kansas Office of Veterans Services (KOVS) is neutral to the transfer of property and has been actively coordinating with the Kansas Historical Society.

When Fort Dodge was established in 1865, the Junior Officer Quarters served as housing for officers assigned to or passing through the post along the Santa Fe Trail. In 1882, the fort was decommissioned and, several years later, the property was converted into the Kansas Soldiers' Home. It has remained in continuous operation since that time, serving Veterans and their Families.

As the mission of the fort evolved, so too did the use of buildings across the campus. To the best of our knowledge, the Junior Officer Quarters has not been used for official purposes since the 1980s. In approx. 2015, several interior elements were removed to support the refurbishment of another historical state building elsewhere. Over the past 20 years, the physical condition of the building has deteriorated due to exposure to the elements. To ensure public safety, a fence has been installed around the property to prevent unauthorized entry.

In recognition of the building's historical significance, KOVS has been in discussions with the Ford County Historical Society, the Kansas Historical Society, and other stakeholders to explore options for its preservation. It became apparent that the Ford County Historical Society has a strong interest in preserving the building's historical character. And in pressing fund raising options. The Junior Officer Quarters was added to the State of Kansas Register of Historic Places in June 2024 and to the National Register of Historic Places in August 2024.

Pending passage of this legislation, the Kansas Historical Society and the Kansas Office of Veterans Services are prepared to execute a Memorandum of Understanding outlining responsibilities for the upkeep and maintenance of the property located on the campus of the Kansas Soldiers' Home.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony.

Respectfully,

(Bill) Turner
Executive Director
Kansas Office of Veterans Services