

January 29th, 2026

RE: HB 2489 Proponent Testimony

Dear Chairwoman Estes and Esteemed Committee Members,

I am writing to you today in support of HB 2489. My name is Eric Burr. I worked for nearly 30 years in Kansas law enforcement, predominately in Arkansas City where I served in many capacities to include D.A.R.E. Officer, investigator and as Police Chief prior to my retirement in 2024. I founded the Suicide Prevention of Cowley County Coalition in 2021 as a result of a spike in adolescent suicides in my county. I worked in tandem with school districts in Cowley County to include Arkansas City, Winfield, Udall, Central of Burden and Dexter to launch a peer to peer suicide prevention program for middle school and high school students called Hope Squad. We are currently in our fourth year of operation with this programming in Arkansas City. After retirement, I worked a short stint with DCCCA as a Community Support Specialist serving southwest Kansas.

I currently serve as the USD 470 Arkansas City Public Schools, Safety and Security Coordinator. In this role, I serve as a Hope Squad Advisor for both middle school and high school. I also oversee a security staff that assists with ensuring the safety of students and staff everyday throughout a district of eight separate campuses. I have assisted with SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) at both the middle school and high school. Last year, I helped launch RESIST chapters at both schools. As a function of our security duties, we are tasked with enforcing school policies as it pertains to vaping, substance use and possession, rendering aid when required, and assisting with prevention efforts.

I write to you as a proponent of HB 2489 from a perspective of being a law enforcement professional, a prevention advocate and current school safety coordinator. During my years working as a police officer, I saw the emergence of several drug trends in my community. Having started in the mid 1990's, I witnessed the effects that cocaine, particularly crack cocaine, had on my community. From there, methamphetamine emerged, first in the form of anhydrous ammonia "cooks" and then to crystal methamphetamine. During this time in my career, I sought out specialized training to detect the types of drugs actively impairing their systems. This training was offered through the Kansas Highway Patrol and was known as the Drug Recognition Expert course.

The misuse of opioids has long since been a concern for many Kansas communities. Initially in the form of prescription medication abuse for such drugs as Oxycodone, Oxycontin, Percocet and Loratab. The illicit forms of opioids such as heroin were not as prevalent as the prescription drug abuse. Within the last fifteen years, fentanyl abuse started in my community when fentanyl patches were obtained, dismantled and opioid was then harvested directly from the time-release patch and ingested.

Fast forward to the last five to ten years, we now see the illicit use of fentanyl and other derivatives surface in powder form. Most concerning, as you may know, is the illicit pill mills that are counterfeiting legitimate appearing prescription pills with fentanyl added in often lethal doses. The introduction of fentanyl is purely to hook the user on opioids to keep them coming back for more. Unfortunately for many youth and their families, there are too many of these counterfeit pills circulating with an amount of fentanyl that is lethal.

Youth can access these counterfeit pills through associates, friends, and most notably through on-line sources utilizing social media. Youth can be exposed to counterfeit pills containing fentanyl even by accident if found at private residences or public spaces such as parks and sidewalks.

Prevention efforts are not consistent throughout the state. Our district utilizes the evidence-based prevention program "Keepin' It Real" that has been adopted by the D.A.R.E. program. A specialized lesson contained in the Keepin' It Real array, addresses Fentanyl. This is an additional or bonus lesson and does not appear as a required lesson to be taught by law enforcement professionals. It then falls on the individual district and corresponding law enforcement agency to place emphasis on educating students, parents and the community on the dangers of fentanyl and opioids.

The primary idea behind prevention programming when it comes to illicit fentanyl use is the awareness that youth and adults alike should never ingest pills that did not come from a pharmacy, hospital or other trusted source like a parent or guardian. Pills obtained from associates, friends, street contacts or social media can be very dangerous. While I have not seen it directly in my community, there have been cases of fentanyl poisoning surfacing in vapes or e-cigarettes. Vaping tobacco and THC in our schools is a growing concern. Add fentanyl to this mix and we will begin seeing overdoses take place in our school hallways, bathrooms and classrooms.

Naloxone training and supplies are essential to meet the current opioid crisis in our communities. In May 2025, a group of Arkansas City High School SADD members conducted a fundraiser to purchase a naloxone distribution box that was placed at a local commodities distribution hub for community members. DCCCA provided the naloxone free of charge to stock the box. During my time with DCCCA, I facilitated fentanyl awareness and naloxone training.

In USD 470 Arkansas City Public Schools, naloxone is stocked in each AED box located in each school building. Additionally, individual safety and security personnel carry naloxone on their person. This philosophy of preparedness is not consistent throughout the state.

I am strongly in favor of the components of HB 2489 that will broaden prevention education for students and families. The target age groups should encompass middle school and high school.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my opinions that are based on my professional experiences.

Eric Burr

USD 470 Arkansas City Public Schools Safety and Security Coordinator - 1.5 years

Hope Squad Advisor - 4 years

Chairperson Suicide Prevention of Cowley County Coalition - 5 years

Former Arkansas City Police Department Police Chief (ret.) - 29 years

Former D.A.R.E. Officer - 4 years trained on old curriculum and new

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