



TOPEKA POLICE DEPARTMENT

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To: Committee on Federal and State Affairs
From: Chris G. Vallejo, City of Topeka
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Re: Proponent Testimony for HB 2164

Chairman Kessler and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the City of Topeka in strong support of House Bill 2164. This legislation represents a meaningful step forward in addressing critical law enforcement recruitment challenges while maintaining the highest standards of public safety and professional training.

Like many municipalities across the country, Topeka has faced persistent difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified law enforcement personnel. Law enforcement agencies are competing not only with the private sector but also with neighboring states that have lower age requirements for peace officers. In recent years, the Topeka Police Department has operated with staffing shortages as high as 15% of its authorized strength, placing additional strain on our dedicated officers and impacting our ability to provide the highest level of service to our community.

Currently, Kansas law requires that police officers be at least 21 years old at the time of employment. HB 2164 proposes to lower that minimum age to 20, expanding the pool of potential recruits without compromising the rigorous training and vetting process that all officers must undergo. This change would allow young Kansans with a strong desire to serve their communities to begin their careers sooner, rather than leaving the state for opportunities elsewhere. In doing so, Kansas would better align with states such as California, Illinois, Maryland, and Vermont, all of which have adopted a minimum age of 20 for law enforcement officers.

It is important to emphasize that enacting HB 2164 would not diminish the quality or preparedness of law enforcement officers. Every candidate, regardless of age, would still be required to successfully complete the comprehensive training mandated by the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center (KLETC). This training ensures that all recruits, including those who enter the profession at a younger age, are fully equipped to handle the responsibilities and challenges of modern policing. Moreover, studies show that individuals who begin their careers earlier often develop long-term commitments to their agencies, fostering stability and continuity within police departments.

Lowering the minimum age to 20 would also position Kansas as a more competitive option for young, motivated individuals considering careers in law enforcement. Neighboring states such as Montana, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin allow individuals to enter the profession at 18. Texas permits candidates as young as 18 if they have an associate degree or an honorable military discharge. Kansas must remain competitive to attract and retain the best talent for our law enforcement agencies.

In closing, HB 2164 represents a proactive solution to the recruitment challenges facing Kansas law enforcement agencies. By responsibly expanding the candidate pool while maintaining rigorous training standards, this bill would strengthen public safety, enhance workforce retention, and ensure that our communities continue to be served by highly qualified officers.

On behalf of the City of Topeka, I respectfully urge the Committee's support for HB 2164. Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.