



REGIONAL FORENSIC SCIENCE CENTER

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TO: Tom Kessler, Chair – Committee on Federal and State Affairs

FROM: Shelly Steadman, Ph.D, Director – Sedgwick County
Regional Forensic Science Center

RE: HB 2331

DATE: February 19, 2025

Chairman and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 2331 relating to the final disposition of unclaimed cremains and associated property. My name is Dr. Shelly Steadman, and I am the Director of the Sedgwick County Regional Forensic Science Center.

The District Coroner has a legal duty to provide the final disposition for unclaimed remains in circumstances where either next of kin cannot be located or where next of kin refuse to accept responsibility for their relative's remains. Kansas coroners have various mechanisms in place for providing this service. Since 2008, Sedgwick County has solicited competitive bids from providers to cremate unclaimed decedents and store the cremains indefinitely. In some cases, there is property associated with the individual that has been separately packaged, which is also stored at the provider facility.

From 2010-2015, Sedgwick County typically dispositioned 10-20 bodies each year. However, in 2016 that number increased to 33 and it has continued to grow since. In 2023, Sedgwick County released 93 bodies to the contracting provider for cremation and storage, and as I write this letter, we have over 500 boxes of cremains (many with associated property) in storage and no statutory guidance on how we may dispose of the rapidly accumulating remains and unclaimed property.

While the law provides direction to funeral homes for management of unclaimed remains and to law enforcement agencies for disposal of unclaimed property, it is silent on a directive for coroners. Kansas coroners need statutory direction on this matter. The passage of this bill would allow us to ensure a respectful and peaceful final resting place for all in our community and throughout the State of Kansas.