



KANSAS STATE TROOPERS ASSOCIATION

To: Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Sage Hill, President
Kansas State Troopers Association

Re: Proponent for Senate Bill 156 Concerning the Unlawful Use of Laser Pointer

Date: February 12, 2022

Senator Warren and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 156. My name is Sage Hill, and I'm appearing here in my capacity as the President of the Kansas State Troopers Association (KSTA).

The KSTA represents over 500 Troopers, motor carrier inspectors, capital police officers, and retirees. Our members serve in the traditional role of keeping Kansans safe as they travel throughout the state. We also support our partner agencies whenever they need us, and our members perform many additional specialized functions by serving in special operations units like the Special Response Team, the Air Support Unit (of which I am a member), and canine. Our Troop K members (Capitol Police) are here each day to keep you safe as you serve in this beautiful building.

The Kansas State Troopers Association strongly supports Senate Bill 156. The State of Kansas does not have specific statutory prohibitions regarding the dangerous/nefarious use of laser pointers against aircraft or law enforcement officers. Thanks to the Kansas Legislature, the Kansas Highway Patrol has recently achieved a meaningful and increased presence in the air. The use of laser pointers against our aircraft has skyrocketed during law enforcement events, and we are not alone. Civilian air traffic, often large commercial planes carrying passengers, as well as our military partners (heavy tanker crews landing and departing McConnell AFB in Wichita, for example), have all seen an increase in these incidents.

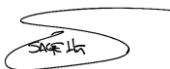
Laser pointers are some of the most intense light sources on the planet, and they are common components in the aiming systems of modern firearms. Initially when officers are illuminated by one, we are usually in the truly precarious situation of not knowing whether or not the laser is attached to a weapon. Even if it isn't, lasers can quickly and permanently damage human eyesight. Additionally, striking an aircraft with a laser can disrupt equipment, and be completely disorienting to the flight crew, creating a genuinely hazardous situation. I have personally been onboard aircraft targeted by laser strikes on numerous occasions, as have my partners and commanders. Here in Kansas, it is punishable both civilly and criminally at the federal level, but not at the state level. Senate Bill 156, if made into law, will give our Troopers and other law enforcement partners meaningful tools to work with when confronted with this dangerous conduct.

Currently, the process to take law enforcement action on a laser incident concerning an aircraft looks something like this: once struck, Air Support crews carefully work through the strikes and attempt to locate the suspect. If our search is successful, we guide law enforcement to the laser's location. Officers confront the suspect(s), identify them, and, if possible, seize the laser. With no criminal statutes in Kansas concerning this conduct, no arrests can be made in the absence of another crime. The information gathered is later forwarded to FBI and FAA. These offenders must then be indicted by a Federal Grand Jury to commence criminal proceedings. The FAA will then often pursue a civil remedy against the offender. The Federal system is a lengthy, complex and convoluted process, and certainly not the most expeditious or useful tool for our Troopers and law enforcement partners in most of these instances. Furthermore, these processes do nothing to address what (in our opinion) should be the criminal use of a laser against officers engaged in more traditional law enforcement functions on the ground. SB 156 also addresses this.

We are encountering more and more career criminal types who are trying to harass and distract us from ongoing criminal investigations and active public safety matters. Specific to using them against aircrews, the use of these laser pointers is putting us in jeopardy, along with the crew and passengers in any other affected aircraft, and the public on the ground should this reckless conduct result in a crash. We are asking you to pass Senate Bill 156 favorably, giving our members and other law enforcement partners the tools necessary to pursue prosecution of this dangerous activity under State law.

Thank you very much for considering my remarks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sage Hill", enclosed within a simple oval outline.

Sage Hill, President
Kansas State Troopers Association