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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of HB 2140. Many of you know that my husband has been a school teacher in the Blue Valley School District for over 30 years. He used to teach "Project Alert" which is a drug education program that has been used sporadically in the Johnson County area. The program has bounced around to various teachers, SRO's, and counselors because no one really had the time to fit it into their curriculum. The result was intermittent and abbreviated lessons that occurred inconsistently or not at all among the school buildings and districts. I have spoken with SRO's, school counselors, school psychologists, parents and teachers about this problem. They all agree that what is being provided isn't enough.

The fentanyl crisis has exploded. According to our KBI Director, since 2018, fentanyl has killed more than 850 people in the Kansas City area. In Johnson County there were 149 fentanyl deaths from 2018-2022. In Olathe alone, that number was 42. Fentanyl victims number much higher when you consider cases where Narcan was given on the scene that saved lives. What's even more disturbing is fentanyl related deaths among children increased more than 30-fold in the last 10 years. Problems increase when you consider other popular drugs on the rise such as marijuana and vaping that is causing a host of health issues in our youth. Combating this starts with education. Consistent, carefully crafted, education that has input from law enforcement, educators, and other experts to give our students the best tools to recognize and understand the threat that is facing them today. D.A.R.E. is a drug education program that has been around for decades, and it has been updated to include the latest opioid threats including fentanyl.

This bill was introduced last year and passed the House twice. The Senate did not pass it out of committee as they were short on time. This bill creates the position of a Statewide Educator. This educator will travel to the schools that are requesting these resources and train SRO's and others who would like to be certified to teach this new program. This is NOT a mandate. This is another resource that if schools choose to adopt this program, it will be available for them.

The prior version of this bill was going to be funded through the Kansas Endowment for Youth Fund (KEY Fund) but there were many concerns raised about using that money. This bill will now be funded through SGF. The fiscal note went down quite a bit and we added a requirement for an annual report to the legislature for updates on the program.

I have heard from parents, a PTO President, victim's families, law enforcement, and school counselors who are in strong support of this bill. I also have a stack of student essays that have expressed what the DARE program has done for them. Let me know if you would like to see them. I urge your support. I believe this will save lives and is the answer to provide consistent, accurate, and up to date drug prevention education to our schools. Thank you!