

Good afternoon and thank you for allowing me to be here today. My name is Craig Walion, I am a Lieutenant with the Johnson County Kansas Sheriff's Office. I am going into my 25th year of service with Johnson County. I am assigned to our Patrol Division; I am a shift commander and one of my assignments is supervising our Community Policing Unit which includes our School Resource Officers. We have 4 total in 2 different school districts with the strong possibility of adding more in the near future.

The establishment of a D.A.R.E. coordinator for Drug Abuse Resistance Education would be the first step in the right direction for the future of Kansas youth. We are at a critical point due to the fentanyl and opioid crisis in our nation and we cannot risk losing this generation. Drugs are being brought into this country at unprecedented rates and they are more readily available than any other time in our history.

According to the DEA, fentanyl is the leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of 18 and 45. In 2023, the DEA seized more than 80 million fentanyl laced fake pills and nearly 12,000 pounds of fentanyl powder. That is the most fentanyl seized in a calendar year, and it amounts to more than 386 million doses of fentanyl, enough to KILL EVERY AMERICAN. In 2024, the DEA seized in excess of 55 million fentanyl pills. The CDC estimates over 94,000 American lives were lost to drug overdoses from July 2023 through July 2024. Keep in mind, this is only accounting for the DEA's seizures, this does not include seizures by local, county and state law enforcement agencies; however it illustrates the scale of the problem.

In 2024, Johnson County had approximately 303 reported opioid overdoses, and 343 documented NARCAN deployments. We live in a time where first responders carry NARCAN, school nurses have NARCAN and it's sold over the counter at most, if not all pharmacies. In short, we have a crisis.

This position and program will allow school resource officers to take part in classroom settings while providing real time drug use and trends that are currently affecting our communities. These usage and trends are also what concerns parents and teachers the most. Aside from skyrocketing fentanyl/opioid use, synthetic drugs, vaping and numerous THC products in easily concealable and digestible forms are prevalent and available for purchase in person or online.

D.A.R.E. provides law enforcement an opportunity to be at the front of the battle during these early and formative educational years. The sooner this is implemented the sooner we can begin to better educate and protect the most vulnerable amongst us.

Currently we provide presentations regarding the dangers of drugs and tailor them to what is being seen in and around the area. We have the benefit of partnering with our Patrol Division, Drug Task Force, Investigations Division and Crime Lab as resources to provide the most up-to-date information on what is taking place in our communities. This is a battle we can fight in real time, and it is a battle we must win given what is at stake. A statewide DARE program will allow our School Resource Officers to become more knowledgeable about the topics they teach and learn how to present them better. The difference they can make in a kid's life can go well beyond the classroom.

I was a high school student in the early 1990's that participated in the D.A.R.E. program in Watervliet, NY. My D.A.R.E. instructor was Police Officer Jerry Beston – his impact in the classroom helped me make the appropriate choices in life and set me on a path that eventually brought me in front of you today. My hope is we could educate and inspire a new generation with this position.