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**Neutral Testimony On SB479
For the Senate Education Committee**

March 5, 2024

Sheriff Jeff Easter, Sedgwick County
Legislative Committee Chair, Kansas Sheriffs Association

Chair Baumgardner and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer neutral testimony on SB479 on behalf of the Kansas Sheriffs Association, Kansas Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Kansas Peace Officers Association.

We recognize and appreciate the motivation behind SB479 to address the shortcomings of the KPERS Tier 3 retirement plan in providing adequate retirement benefits that are much less than those offered by KPERS Tier 2. The Tier 3 plan is one of the issues causing challenges in hiring and retention of employees in many government professions. Law enforcement is no exception.

The interest in the bill by our associations is because about 2/3 of our agencies, with about 1/3 of the law enforcement officers in Kansas, are not KP&F members but are members of local KPERS. 100% of our support personnel, dispatchers, and non-sworn jail staff are local KPERS if the agency is under the State retirement system, which most are.

We are faced with critical staff shortages in many of our county jails and dispatch centers. This is due to not only recruitment challenges but also challenges in retention for positions that require 24/7 coverage. We see the same challenges in our support staff employment. Salary and benefit challenges are often cited in an employee's or applicant's decision to work elsewhere. While salary is a local issue, the benefit of a meaningful retirement program is out of the local agencies' hands for those in the KPERS system. We must rely on legislation to address this issue.

We are asking that if you move this bill forward, you amend it to extend the change beyond education employees and include all county and municipal employees. We believe this would be a key advantage to lead people to seek government employment and to stay in government employment, helping us provide the public safety support our communities need.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sheriff Jeff Easter, Sedgwick County
Legislative Committee Chair
Kansas Sheriffs Association