

CALVIN H. HAYDEN  
SHERIFF



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**Testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee in Support of HB2583  
March 7, 2024**

Chair Warren, Vice Chair Wilborn, Ranking Member Corson, and Member of the Committee:

The Johnson County Sheriff's Office appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this bill with the addition of an amendment.

I last served with a K-9 unit over 30 years ago and things have certainly changed since then. However, two things have not. One, these dogs are valuable assets and resources for law enforcement agencies, providing services to the community that would otherwise not be possible. Two, there is a strong bond between the dog and the handler that enhances the performance of both officers.

One of the things that has changed since I was associated with K-9 units is the amazing variety of tasks they can carry out. These law enforcement dogs can find missing persons, find/apprehend fleeing suspects, protect officers and/or others, find deceased bodies, locate explosives, assist in arson investigations, find electronic components, and comfort a child or adult who has experienced or witnessed a critical incident.

Under current law, these magnificent animals are not property, which is basically how the current statute regards them. The enhanced penalties of this bill reflect the importance and contributions of these animals.

As I stated at the beginning of my testimony, we are offering an amendment to the bill that we think is needed. Basically, we are asking this committee to strike the second amendment that they House Judiciary Committee added to the bill. The amendment that was added removes assistance dogs from the enhanced penalty. We feel this is a serious mistake.

I have provided a copy of the amendment that was added for reference.

Our agency employs a critical incident dog who may respond to crime scenes. Their work is not always done in a safe environment. This dog, Gus, is also undergoing cross training in search and rescue. Our concern with the amendment (the 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment that was added to the bill) is that Gus would not receive the same protections under the law that other law enforcement dogs do. Gus was specially trained to respond to assist in critical incidents, as well as provide community relations functions, and soon to be deployed in search and rescue operations. How would Gus be "defined" under this bill as amended?

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Based on the uncertainty of where a law enforcement dog like Gus would fall on the definition spectrum of KSA 39-1113: **Assistance dogs and professional therapy dogs; definitions**, we would ask for the amendment to be stricken.

You will hear other testimony that attests to the value of law enforcement dogs in many different environments and situations. They face the same dangers as their human partners, and they deserve to be protected under the law with a penalty for those who injure or kill these K-9 officers that reflects the severity of the offense.

We would ask the committee to recommend the bill favorably for passage with our suggested amendment.

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