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Proponent Testimony to the
Senate Committee on Judiciary
House Bill No. 2583
Sergeant Ben Jonker
Kansas State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police
March 7, 2024

Madam Chair Warren and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify in support of House Bill No. 2583. I'm Sergeant Ben Jonker, a 23-year law enforcement veteran and the K-9 Unit Supervisor at the Wichita Police Department. My testimony today is offered as a member of the Kansas State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police. There are 4,300 members of FOP lodges throughout Kansas.

Over the past 9 years, I've served as both a K-9 supervisor and handler, partnering with two K-9s: my current partner, Oz, a 7-year-old Belgian Malinois, and my previous partner, Kilo. Today, I'd like to provide insights into the world of law enforcement K-9s, covering the costs, time, and energy involved in obtaining and training these essential assets. Additionally, I'll address how we utilize K-9s in the community and emphasize the critical need to strengthen laws for harsher penalties against individuals who harm or kill working police K-9s.

Untrained K-9s typically cost \$8,000–\$10,000 and are sourced from American vendors who import dogs from European countries like Germany, Hungary, or the Netherlands. European-bred dogs often meet stricter breeding standards and are trained similarly to police K-9s. The selection process ensures the right temperament, drives, and traits, making these dogs effective, though the cost reflects their quality.

Transforming an untrained dog into a high-functioning police K-9 involves an intensive training program. Our department collaborates with the Kansas Highway Patrol's K-9 program, undergoing a 10- to 12-week, full-time training program that covers approximately 400 hours of intense training in the detection of illegal narcotics and patrol work. Many agencies face higher expenses if they lack in-house trainers, having to pay for already-trained dogs or sending handlers to external training classes, incurring additional costs for accommodation and meals.

In my K-9 career, I've tragically taken part in calls that resulted in the deaths of two police K-9s, Rooster and Bane. The current penalties for suspects involved in these killings are limited to a maximum of 1 year in jail, which is unacceptable. These dogs are highly trained and valued



members of our departments, akin to family members. The current state statute, treating their lives as equivalent to equipment, fails to consider the emotional and financial strain their deaths impose on handlers and law enforcement agencies.

With my current partner, Oz, the bond formed through thousands of hours of training is profound. These dogs, finely tuned and exceptionally trained, deserve recognition beyond their role in law enforcement. They are community heroes, contributing not only to detecting illegal drugs or apprehending criminals but also engaging with community groups, attending church meetings, and participating in educational activities.

Oz is more than a piece of equipment; he is a part of my family. The community adores these dogs, and they deserve better than what the current legal provisions offer. I appreciate your time and consideration on this crucial issue.

Thank you for allowing my testimony today and I am pleased to answer questions at the appropriate time.

Sergeant Ben Jonker

Kansas State Lodge Fraternal Order of Police