

Testimony for the Kansas House of Representatives, Federal and State Affairs Committee
Presented January 26, 2016 in Support of House Bill 2468

It is an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to address the House, Federal and State Affairs Committee and to offer comments in support of House Bill 2468

I am a County 4-H Shooting Sports Coordinator for Sedgwick County, a 4-H Shooting Sports Instructor, and a parent of three shooters.

Shooting sports is one of the largest 4-H projects in the state of Kansas with 96 counties participating in some program in shooting sports and over 2500 youth enrolled in the BB, Air Rifle and Air Pistol programs for the 2015-2016 4-H Year. Besides BB, Air Rifle and Air Pistol, there are programs for archery, small bore rifle, small bore pistol, muzzleloading, and hunting skills. The outdoor sports programs are not affected by these bills.

In Kansas, 4-H shooting sports began in the 1990's. A relatively young program, Kansas youth excel nationally in the shooting sports. The coaches and the parents know the opportunities and benefits of these programs.

Unfortunately, not all Kansas counties have a shooting sports program. Many parts need to be in place to build a program. One difficult requirement is finding a suitable location for the activity to ensure safety and to enhance participation. To participate, a county must also have a county coordinator and a certified instructor for each of the disciplines that they plan to offer. To become a certified instructor or county coordinator, a volunteer must attend a 3 day training where they are taught a comprehensive seminar. It includes, instruction regarding the safe operation of the shooting sports program, fundamentals of successful competition, the different guns used in the discipline, and the rules for competition. They are taught how to interact with youth. Always the strongest emphasis is on safety. They also demonstrate what they learned presenting youth programs to the instructors.

4-H trained instructors have demonstrated responsible use of public facilities across our state for decades. The termination of a shooting sports program based solely on the whims of a public official that refuses to give credence to the parents, participants and employees who oversaw the program that operated successfully for three decades is a tragedy that should never reoccur in our State.

If a youth wants to be involved with shootings sports, before they are allowed to practice or compete in the program, they must go through a safety course as well. Here safety is emphasized to a great degree. We will not allow unsafe shooters in our programs. We start by teaching them on a small group basis. In our county, the younger shooters have an adult with them at all times until they demonstrate that they know safe gun handling techniques. At all of our practices and matches, there is a range officer that is responsible for watching for unsafe conditions and correcting those. The youth learn that anyone can call a "Cease Fire" if they see an unsafe condition. We also teach them that if they see a gun somewhere, they should not touch it without permission.

In our county we are lucky to have an extension office that has facilities for us to use for practice. It takes a large area to set up a range and for each practice, we set up traps and take them down and clean. We have backdrops to protect the walls when necessary.

In order for Kansas youth to improve, they need to compete against other shooters. Many counties are lacking access to indoor areas to hold matches. If the number of matches in the state becomes limited, it affects the chances for Kansas youth to advance to higher level competitions. Multi-discipline competitions require a larger spaces that is climate controlled. A school gym is perfect for this. If a county is unable to find a large enough space to accommodate all disciplines, they will have their match over two days on a weekend. For families that involved in church activities, they are limited to the matches they can attend because they can't shoot on Sundays. We, currently, have five shooters who are not able to shoot on Sunday. For this year, there are four matches where air rifle shoots on Sunday while other disciplines shoot on Saturday. Our five shoots cannot attend those matches. If the family has children in different disciplines it becomes difficult also. Some school districts have no problem with shooting sports using their facilities while others will not allow it.

The benefits of shootings sports are numerous. I have seen kids that have trouble in school focusing, focus for 10-15 minutes to do their position and excel. As their proficiency increases, their focus at school increases, correspondingly. I have three children that did not consider themselves athletics until they joined this sport. They now have a sport of their own and feel successful. Two of them have been able to participate in national competitions. As a side note, we have seen shooters come to us that didn't know they need glasses until they got on the line and found they couldn't see the target clearly.

As shooters improve, they can really go places with their shooting. Lydia Paterson from Wyandotte County started shooting BB gun in 4-H as a youth. Now at 19 she is traveling representing the United States of America to other countries for competitions. She is in line for a spot on the US Air Pistol Olympic Team competing in Rio this summer. She is competing this week in Europe. Without her start as a young girl in shooting sports, she would not have had these opportunities. Scholarships are also available to those that want to continue the sport in college.

Shooting sports also gives the older students a chance to mentor to younger students. Junior Apprentice Instructors go through the same three day training as the adults and assist at practices and matches. I would like to invite you to observe our program. Practices are held at least weekly. Competitions are scheduled across the State in many of your fellow legislators' districts.

I am attaching pictures of our latest match that we held in Wichita. We had youth from 15 different counties shooting. We started the match at 7 AM and the last group was complete by about 5 PM. We had over 150 youth participating. You can see the instructors and/or parents on the line with the shooters. You can see the backdrop that protects the building. You can see that the shooters and parents are being safe.

I am sure you will see the value of these programs to Kansas families.

I want to urge the committee to support HB2468 and report it out favorably for passage.

Respectfully submitted,
Susie Klausmeyer



