

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
Hon. John Barker, Chairman

March 3, 2016, 1:30 p.m.
Room 218-N

Amanda Truan, Clerk of the Ellis County District Court, 23rd Judicial District, agates@23rdjudicial.org

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2704 MARKET ADJUSTMENT

Thank you, Chairman Barker and all of the committee members for allowing me to present testimony in support of HB 2704. I am Amanda Truan, Clerk of the Ellis County District Court in the 23rd Judicial District. I am here today as a member of the Kansas Association of District Court Clerks and Court Administrators and as one of the approximately 1,600 non-judicial employees of the State of Kansas. I have been a Clerk of the Court for 9 years and a judicial branch employee for 13 years. Throughout my time as a state employee with the judicial branch, I have noticed employee retention and new employee hiring becoming increasingly difficult.

Filling open positions has become more and more problematic due to the extremely low pay. Statewide, clerk's offices are getting about one-tenth of the employment applications compared to two years ago. The starting wages offered to deputy clerks is inadequate to support a family and pay bills in comparison to private sector jobs. This has caused court offices statewide to hire lackluster employees, which in turn leads to employee retention issues. It is difficult to retain a new employee in the first year. Court work is not easy; in fact it is quite cumbersome. It requires in-depth knowledge across many subject areas, it is specialized and requires significant training. This leads to some new hires not making it through the probationary period due to poor job performance or many employees leave because they are able to find other jobs with better pay and fewer responsibilities in the private sector or other state agencies. Entry level positions at Ellis County start at nearly \$3.00 an hour more but with less work and less stress. Employees working at Hobby Lobby in Hays have a starting pay of \$15.24 an hour compared to a Trial Court Clerk II position in the State of Kansas at \$11.52.

Current non-judicial employees' morale seems to be at an all-time low due to lack of pay and lack of raises in comparison with other state agencies. The long term, dedicated employees of the 105 clerk of the district court offices across the state will tell you that they have prided themselves on their work and that they truly love their jobs. Unfortunately, we are seeing more delays in court work being processed, more mistakes and employee burnout is becoming a real issue.

The district court clerk's office is the first face the public sees as part of the court system. The court remaining open and fully functioning ensures the public has timely access to the multitude of services we offer. Not only does the court remaining open benefit attorneys and various litigants access to justice, it allows a bride and groom to get their marriage license, a battered woman to get a protection from abuse order, a local abstractor to complete title work to ensure a loan is processed on a new home purchase, a landlord to evict a tenant, and oil companies to search for land titles. These are just a few examples of people the court serves. It is imperative that our office is staffed with knowledgeable, professional employees to meet the various needs of the public.

Please consider this bill favorably. I am happy to answer questions.