



KANSAS ASSOCIATION OF COURT SERVICES OFFICERS

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
Hon. John Barker, Chairman

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Room 112-N

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2704 MARKET ADJUSTMENT

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and this honorable committee for extending the opportunity to present testimony in support of HB 2704. I am Stephanie Springer and I am the Chief Court Services officer (CCSO) in the 27th Judicial District in Reno County. I am here today as a Court Services Officer (CSO) and as a member of the Kansas Association of Court Services Officers (KACSO), which currently represents over 300 officers across Kansas.

HB 2704 is requesting \$16.8 million for Judiciary operations. Of that amount, \$8.5 million is appropriated for all non-judicial staff, which includes Court Services Officers. This amount is in line with prior salary adjustments that were approved by the 2008 legislature that remains unfunded.

I have been a Court Services Officer for 18 years and over the past several years it has become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain good probation officers. Caseloads are more complex than they were ten years ago. At one time supervision was asking the probationer a handful of questions to make sure that we knew where they lived, if they were working and if they had any law enforcement contact. On occasion we would run a drug screen to make sure they weren't using drugs. Today, supervision is based on risk level and spending more time with moderate and high risk offenders. Not only do we make sure that the probationer is following court orders, we have them participate in appropriate evidence based programming to try and facilitate permanent change in the offender. We are tasked with the responsibility of keeping the public safe while trying to guide the probationer in making

The mission of the Kansas Association of Court Services Officers is to challenge, educate, support and advocate for the membership by promoting fellowship and professionalism, providing relevant training opportunities and maintaining communication with all members. The organization will further this mission by encouraging collaboration with our Court Services Officers and professional organizations and by recognizing member excellence.

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lifelong changes. Finding the right officers to supervise sex offenders and other high risk offenders in the community presents a special challenge in that the compensation provided has not kept pace with the skills and experience needed to supervise these very special populations.

The risk assessment tool, which is a primary component to determine supervision level, is much different than it was ten years ago. Officers are required to train and pass a certification process to be able to accurately assess the level and type of risk an offender presents, so that appropriate supervision plans can be made. Careful analysis and people skills are necessary to determine the right level of supervision. Continuing education hours are mandatory to keep up with the certifications. Motivational interviewing techniques should be used in order to engage the probationer, determine changes that need to be made and to set realistic goals with the probationer to make those changes. Unfortunately, the pay does not match the level of expertise, and officers take jobs with county community corrections, law enforcement and private sector that pay much better. This situation leaves Court Services lacking the experienced officers we need to assess and supervise those in our custody and keep the public safe.

Recruitment and retention has been a huge problem for us over the last several years. Here are a few examples of recruitment issues:

- There was an open position in Sherman County a few years ago. CCSO, Kathy Russell indicated she interviewed ten applicants, only two were appropriate and one of those withdrew because she found a better paying job in the area.
- CCSO Lisa Dusin, from Phillips County currently has an open position with only three applicants to interview. Those applications came through after having to extend the application deadline.
- The last open position I had in Reno County resulted in 15 applicants and only one applicant that had the skill sets necessary for the position.

Recruitment is not only an issue in the rural areas of the state. In both rural and urban areas, CSO positions have had to be reopened due to not receiving qualified applicants.

Retention has also been an issue in CSO offices throughout the state. Here are a few examples:

- CCSO Candace Giefer, from Sumner County has lost three CSOs to United States Probation, and one left to become a magistrate Judge.
- CCSO Melinda Wilson from Sedgwick County has lost several CSOs to law enforcement and private sector positions over the last few years.
- In my jurisdiction there are three CSOs that will be able to retire within the next couple of years. At this time two indicated to me that they plan to find other employment once they are able to retire because their compensation is not keeping up with the additional skills and certifications they must now maintain.

Morale has been at an all-time low for Court Services. For staff that topped out on the pay scale in 2008, their take home pay is less. The two percent increase that we received in 2014 was nullified by the increase in contributions to KPERS. Insurance rates have gone up as has the cost of living. There are no incentives for Court Service Officers to stay employed with us when they can get paid better elsewhere.

Court Services Officers are responsible for keeping the public safe by making sure that probationers follow the orders of the court and successfully complete probation. There has been an increase in working with probationers that have mental health diagnoses as well as an increase in drug offenders and sex offenders throughout the state. There are times when situations could become highly volatile and CSOs must have the skills necessary to diffuse those situations. Potential CSOs must pass an FBI background check to be hired as well as pass a yearly background check to remain employed. It has become increasingly difficult to find and retain people that have the skills, experience and basic requirements to fill Court Services Officers' positions. Please consider this bill favorably. I am happy to answer questions.