

Testimony IN OPPOSITION to SB 179  
Before the Senate Committee on Commerce  
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Chairperson Lynn and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Laura Calhoun and I have worked for the Department of Corrections for over eighteen years. Today I am speaking to you as a private citizen, and not as a representative of any state agency. As a long-term state employee, I am asking you to vote against SB 179.

In Corrections, it is vitally important that front-line staff have a voice in their working conditions. We are the ones in best position to see things that might be safety threats, the ones in best position to see potential solutions to problems, the best position to see where policy decisions that sound great in theory may not work well in practice. We also work in an environment where inmates can and do make baseless complaints against staff.

Without a right to grieve unjust discipline, inmates would know officers could be targeted and moved toward termination from a series of untrue, baseless complaints. I personally have represented many employees who have only had their jobs saved because of our ability to contest the discipline. If we lost that right, our facility's already high turnover rate would be even higher.

Without the obligation for management to meet with us in labor management meetings, we would not have a forum to discuss staff concerns such as vehicle safety, training programs, and equipment issues.

The past year has been one where Kansas Correctional facilities have seen many inmate on officer attacks. Those of us who do these jobs, who put our safety on the line every single day, deserve input into our working conditions. We deserve the right to let management know what makes us vulnerable in the workplace, what unnecessary dangers exist that could be corrected. If you deny us these rights you are telling us, in no uncertain terms, that our lives and safety do not matter to this Legislature.

If you pass SB 179, you are creating an environment where I as an officer have fewer rights than the inmates living within my facility's walls. We deserve better than that. Please join me in opposing SB 179. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.