

## Testimony before the Senate Federal and State Affairs regarding SB 62

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I want to thank the Chairman and committee members for the opportunity to appear here today and present testimony in support of SB 62. SB 62 would give the responsibility of administering and identifying funding for the State Search and Rescue initiative to the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

In 2007, responders from around the state met in Topeka to discuss ways to improve collapse search and rescue response in the state. That initiative was even more realized when on May 4, 2007 the devastating tornado struck Greensburg, Kansas. The Kansas Search & Rescue Working Group (KSARWG) was formed and supported by the Kansas Division of Emergency Management and the Adjutant General's Office. The KSARWG was formally chartered in September 2008 under the deployable Resources Committee of the Governor's Commission on Emergency Planning and Response (CEPR). The KSARWG's mission is to improve the overall search & rescue response capabilities in the State of Kansas and beyond, thereby ensuring that responders at all levels are prepared to provide a coordinated response to any natural or man-made disaster.

The current search and rescue working group is made up of one representative from:

Each of the seven homeland security regions

State Fire Marshal's Office

Kansas Division of Emergency Management

National Guard/ Crisis City

Kansas Fire and Rescue Training Institute

Kansas Search and Rescue Dog Association

The current search and rescue initiative is made up of approximately 39 emergency response departments across the state and over 125 individuals from those participating agencies. Over the last 5-6 years there has been close to \$5,000,000 dollars of homeland security money invested in the state search and rescue initiative for equipment and training but those homeland security funds are beginning to diminish and we are unsure how long they will be available. The Fire Marshal's Office along with other state agencies believes that this resource is much too valuable to the state to let it gradually wither away from lack of funding and direction. The local departments involved in the search and rescue initiative do not have the funding or administrative support to continue the program on their own. Our office is committed to keep this program a very viable resource for the state and its citizens and have been working with the Kansas Department of Emergency Management, the Kansas Highway Patrol and the working group to do so. The product of this cooperation is the proposed legislation before you today.

If this legislation is successful our office proposes running the search and rescue program almost identical to our current Hazmat response program. Both initiatives are made up of local fire departments and emergency responders from around the state with the hazmat program being in place for over 12 years now. Our office will actually sign MOUs with each individual department that will allow our office to reimburse the local departments for hours of the responders and their call back replacements along with expendable supplies used for each assigned response and also for training events. We will help provide and coordinate any necessary training that the responders require to keep up their certifications and provide any new training based on changes in the best practices or new techniques in the search and rescue field. To accomplish all of this our office will be asking for additional FY16 spending authority in the amount of \$200,000 from the Fire Marshal Fee Fund. Approximately half of those funds would be used to provide training to the current search and rescue teams and the canine search and rescue groups with the other half used for salary and wages for one or two positions at our office. The hazmat program currently has a program manager and public executive II position (training coordinator/deliverer, equipment acquisition and replacement, technical support) positions, which we will attempt to add the additional search and rescue responsibilities to. We believe though, that an administrative assistant position will be needed right away to help manage the day to day paperwork, training classes and records, etc. related to both programs. If in the future it is determined that the new search and rescue responsibilities are too much for the current program manager and public executive position to handle along with their hazmat responsibilities an additional public executive position may be needed for the search and rescue program to keep both programs running smoothly. Our office will only fill this position upon proper justification to and permission from the Department of Administration, Office of Human Resources and the Governor's office.

The other funding issue for the committee's consideration is the current hazmat response fund. This fund is used to reimburse local departments for the time and equipment expenditures but currently is only for hazmat responses. If the bill is successful the name of this fund would be changed to the emergency response fund which would allow it to be used for either hazmat or search and rescue response. When this fund was initiated years back it was with an initial set amount and no continuing funding source to replenish it as it was used was created. With the addition of search and rescue responses coming from that fund the bill changes the name of the fund to the Emergency Response Fund and also establishes a \$500,000 limit for that fund. The bill will allow the Fire Marshal's Office to transfer surplus funds at the end of each budget year to keep that fund at or as close to the \$500,000 limit as possible.

I again want to thank the Chairman and committee members for the opportunity to appear here today and present testimony in support of SB 62, and will stand for any questions at this time.