

Testimony Offered in support of HB 2549
Leavenworth County Sheriff Andy Dedeke
to the

FEDERAL AND STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

March 16, 2016

Law enforcement, perhaps now more than ever, requires help from external sources. These sources must work collaboratively in order to address the challenges presented in a manner which best facilitates the demands of public safety.

The State of Kansas can boast cooperative and professional law enforcement officers throughout the state. What unites these men and women is their desire to serve their communities much as the sheepdog watches over its flock. There exists a willingness to work together, lend a helping hand and to share resources that are not always readily available.

Certainly, not all communities enjoy the same level of equipment, training or personnel and indeed some are very isolated. Nevertheless, all communities have that point at which help from outside agencies must be called upon. This may be a natural disaster preceded by a warning such as a flood or tornado. Increasingly, the threat is man-made and often strike without warning. Critical incidents such as school shootings, explosive devices and mass disturbances are but just a few examples of the stories we see all too often on our nightly news. While I thank God each and every day my community has been relatively spared such atrocities, I realize each day brings us one day closer to confronting such an evil.

I believe every Sheriff and Chief of Police is cognizant of the dangers their officers face daily and know just how difficult it can be to maintain the peace and protect our citizens. We train for a variety of scenarios and develop reaction plans to guide our response. Planning and training are great ways to prepare, however when it becomes necessary to execute a response the toll upon personnel and equipment can be crippling.

With few exceptions, most law enforcement agencies in Kansas simply cannot sustain the demands necessary for any given critical incident. Indeed, this is the very reason so many of us respond to requests for mutual aid and memorandums of understanding. Simply, the task is too large for one agency to carry the burden of a critical incident entirely.

The significance of HB 2549 is that any chief executive (or designee) may call upon agencies from across state lines when additional assistance is needed, much like the option available for intrastate assistance. Those who respond do so voluntarily as there is not an obligation to provide assistance. Those who do choose to respond are deemed to be employees of the requesting entity and therefore afforded the protections of their Kansas counterparts regarding liability and immunity, as applicable.

As part of the Kansas City Metropolitan Area, northern Leavenworth County is situated along the Missouri River. Several prisons exist in this region as does a large federal government footprint including Fort Leavenworth which hosts dozens of foreign officers and their families annually and is the recipient of many visits by dignitaries. Certainly the argument can be made these circumstances alone are cause for additional security and crisis response planning. Adding to this concern is the presence of a military regional jail facility and the United States Disciplinary Barracks, both of which are home to high profile inmates.

Our concern is heightened by the unresolved commitment of President Obama to close the Guantanamo Bay facility and relocate the remaining prisoners to a short list of locations in the United States, one of which is Fort Leavenworth. If selected, this action would have a large and unfavorable consequence to our community and definitely present a large scale reaction to any breach or attempted breach of security. Should such a situation present itself, our Missouri partners are positioned to respond in an expedited manner.

As you revisit this bill which was originally introduced in 2015, please note the three Kansas counties included in the MARC Region which were the original focus of the bill have been expanded to include all 105 counties in the state. This change illustrates the desire of Kansas law enforcement to work collectively and collaboratively with our partners to provide the greatest level of public safety available.

The items of contention by those opposed to the original bill have been resolved and so once again we request your consideration and support of HB 2549 as it relates to law enforcement assistance from foreign jurisdictions.