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PROPONENT -Testimony Regarding SB 477
Before the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare
Submitted by: Rebecca Proctor
Executive Director, Kansas Organization of State Employees
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Chairman O'Donnell and Members of the Committee:

My name is Rebecca Proctor, and I am the Executive Director of the Kansas Organization of State Employees (KOSE). KOSE represents over 8,000 Executive Branch employees. We cover employees in every single county of the State, including employees at Larned State Hospital and Osawatomie State Hospital.

KOSE members believe legislative oversight of state agency operations is a good thing, and we support this effort of our elected representatives to be informed about conditions at our state hospitals, including staffing levels, employee relations and facility safety. It is difficult to make sound policy decisions without unvarnished facts, and your direct oversight will help insure you have those facts. That said, while we believe this bill is a good start, it doesn't go nearly far enough.

Our state hospitals have made headlines due to tragic and preventable events. However, unsafe conditions related to understaffing exist at many of our state agencies and are faced by employees on a daily basis. We believe the legislature needs more open communication from ALL state agencies about staffing challenges and recruitment/retention efforts and plans.

Accordingly, while direct oversight of the state hospitals starts us down the right path, we believe there should be an obligation for transparency about staffing levels at every agency/facility and the dangers low staffing creates for both employees and non-employees at and around those facilities. We would point this committee, and this legislature, to the provisions of HB 2559 which would not only require all state agencies to develop and publish minimum safe staffing levels, but would also require each agency secretary to request from the legislature an appropriation sufficient to fund minimum safe staffing levels. Each agency would have to detail how the safe minimum

staffing level was determined, and would have to identify the dangers of falling below minimum staffing levels. HB 2559 also requires a monthly report to the legislature showing how each facility's actual staffing compares to the minimum safe staffing level.

Why is this crucial information? Because it would allow proactive and preventive action by you as policy makers, ensuring you the ability to step in and provide more direct oversight BEFORE a tragedy occurs.

It is no secret our state has budget issues, but how those budget issues impact the safety of our state employees and the communities/citizens they serve is shrouded in secrecy and only comes to light once a tragedy occurs. We applaud your efforts regarding the state hospitals, but ask you to please broaden your focus as to prevention and oversight.