



## TOPEKA POLICE DEPARTMENT

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To: Senate Committee on Judiciary  
From: Chief Chris G. Vallejo, City of Topeka  
Date: March 10, 2025  
Re: Proponent Testimony for HB 2164

Chair Warren and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the City of Topeka in strong support of House Bill 2164. This legislation represents a meaningful step forward in addressing critical law enforcement recruitment challenges while maintaining the highest standards of public safety and professional training. With me today is Deputy Chief Jamey Haltom who is also available for questions.

Like many municipalities across the country, Topeka has faced persistent difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified law enforcement personnel. Law enforcement agencies are competing not only with the private sector but also with other states that have lower age requirements for peace officers. In recent years, the Topeka Police Department has operated with staffing shortages as high as 15% of its authorized strength, placing additional strain on our dedicated officers and impacting our ability to provide the highest level of service to our community.

Currently, Kansas law requires that police officers be at least 21 years old at the time of employment. HB 2164 proposes to lower that minimum age to 20, expanding the pool of potential recruits without compromising the rigorous training and vetting process that all officers must undergo. This change would allow young Kansans with a strong desire to serve their communities to begin their careers sooner, rather than leaving the state for opportunities elsewhere. In doing so, Kansas would better align with states such as Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, which all of which have adopted a minimum age of 20 with similar types of laws as is proposed for law enforcement officers to be 21 by completion of the academy.

It is important to emphasize that enacting HB 2164 would not diminish the quality or preparedness of law enforcement officers. Every candidate, regardless of age, would still be required to successfully complete the comprehensive training mandated by the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center (KLETC). This training ensures that all recruits, including those who enter the profession at a younger age, are fully equipped to handle the responsibilities and challenges of modern policing. The Topeka Police Academy is 23 weeks in comparison to the KLETC which is only 14 weeks. As we have a much longer academy, we are only able to run two academy classes a year making this issue a more pronounced problem for our recruiting compared to the rest of the State.

Lowering the minimum age to 20 would also position Kansas as a more competitive option for young, motivated individuals considering careers in law enforcement. Kansas must remain competitive to attract and retain the best talent for our law enforcement agencies.

In closing, HB 2164 represents a proactive solution to the recruitment challenges facing Kansas law enforcement agencies. By responsibly expanding the candidate pool while maintaining rigorous training standards, this bill would strengthen public safety, enhance workforce retention, and ensure that our communities continue to be served by highly qualified officers.

On behalf of the City of Topeka, I respectfully urge the Committee's support for HB 2164. Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.