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Testimony in Support of House Bill 2044
Increasing the Penalty for Drug Distribution Resulting in Death or Great Bodily Harm

Presented to the Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice
By Cherokee County Sheriff David M. Groves

Chairman Rubin and Members of the Committee: January 30, 2013

It is an honor to have the opportunity to express my support of HB 2044.

During my law enforcement career, I have seen the tragic effects that drug abuse has had, not only on the abusers, but their families and community, as well.

These effects include horrid environments where children are raised, heartache for parents and family members, and an overall devaluation of the quality of life in our communities.

Sometimes, the drug abuse results in death.

Over the past several years, I have seen an increase in drug abuse, primarily prescription drug abuse.

This is extremely concerning, because a vast number of those who abuse these drugs are young adults.

Typically abusers tell me that they didn't think any harm would come to them, because after all, prescription drugs come from a doctor.

Of course those who abuse the drugs, many of them anyway, are not being treated by a doctor. They are obtaining prescription medication from drug dealers.

While I have not personally come across such an event, I have spoken to law enforcement officials in neighboring jurisdictions, who have told me about "skittle parties." This

consists of teenagers and young adults filling a bowl with an assortment of prescription pills, and taking them by the handfuls.

In an attempt to curb the access to these drugs, my office has been participating twice a year in the United States Drug Enforcement Administration's National Drug Take Back Events.

In just a few years, my office alone has collected over 700 pounds of expired, unused or unwanted prescription medication. That's 700 pounds of medications that won't be stolen during a burglary (and later sold) or taken by kids and grandkids from the family medicine cabinet.

But that alone is not enough.

While I agree that the abuser contributes to this epidemic, the drug dealers – suppliers – are often left unaccountable; with no Kansas Statute specifically addressing their crime if the abuser suffers great bodily harm or death.

In addition to 22-year-old Jordan Krokroskia, who died of a Fentanyl overdose at his Baxter Springs home in July 2012, a month year earlier, on June 20, 2012, a 27-year-old Columbus man left behind a young daughter after he was found dead in his home, also from a Fentanyl overdose.

A year prior to that, another Columbus man, age 45, was found dead as the result of a drug overdose, this time Oxycontin.

I could give additional examples, but what I want to stress here is that this is a serious issue, harming our residents, and as a Sheriff, I am coming to you for assistance.

Law enforcement needs to be armed with the proper tools to do their job effectively. The passage of HB 2044 will allow us to properly hold those who distribute these drugs, especially when they actually result in death, accountable in an appropriate manner.

The passage of this bill better enables law enforcement to keep our communities safe, and is being supported by the Kansas Sheriff's Association, who voiced that support when I presented the proposal to their Legislative Committee on December 13, 2012.

Again, I thank you for this opportunity.

David M. Groves
Sheriff, Cherokee County