



**Testimony on Senate Bill 117
Senate Committee on Ways and Means**

**Presented by
Colonel Ernest Garcia
Kansas Highway Patrol**

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Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I am Colonel Ernie Garcia and I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the Kansas Highway Patrol (KHP) regarding Senate Bill 117. I want to thank the committee for sponsoring this bill, one of critical importance to the Patrol's operational and life safety capabilities.

The provisions of this bill would repeal a 1990 law that requires the KHP to annually transfer \$500,000 from its training center fund to the state general fund. In our SFY 2014 budget submission, we requested authority to retain this money to establish a stable and dedicated funding source with which to hire new troopers. Governor Brownback saw the logic and appropriateness in that request and included it as a recommendation in his 2014 budget.

The KHP has struggled the past several years in filling trooper vacancies. There are a number of factors that have played into this situation, but the largest by far is of a fiscal nature.

The state's recent financial crisis has led to less funding for all state agencies and consequently, the KHP will have only hired two state funded recruit classes in the previous five fiscal years. For several years leading up to this time, we had hired two classes per year. The result has been a reduction in trooper staffing from a high of 501 in 2006 to 441 as I stand before you today.

I believe that the sporadic availability of enhancement funding has had a tremendously negative affect on our ability to attract and hire qualified applicants. The unpredictability of funding hampers recruiting efforts and frustrates potential applicants who like the KHP are left wondering when or if we will have funding for a class. I believe many seeking a job in law enforcement look elsewhere for this reason.

If Senate Bill 117 is passed, it will provide the KHP with a dedicated and constant funding source that can be utilized to hire new troopers. The \$500,000 addressed in the bill, when combined with money from funded positions vacated through retirement, should allow us to

establish a constant timeline for hiring new troopers and drastically improve recruitment efforts when we and applicants know from one year to the next when we'll be hiring.

Senate Bill 117 contains provisions that can enhance the Patrol's life safety mission. I hope that you agree with the merits of the bill and favorably pass it out of committee for further consideration by the full Senate.

Again, I appreciate your time today and would be happy to stand for questions.

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