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BARTON, EDWARDS, HODGEMAN, KIOWA, LANE, NESS,
PAWNEE, PRATT, RICE, RUSH, SCOTT & STAFFORD COUNTIES

Testimony in support of
SB 477
March 14, 2016

SB 477 was introduced as a result of ongoing problems at our state psychiatric hospitals. I have represented Larned since 2005, and have observed morale go from bad to worse. In speaking with long-term employees, Larned State Hospital (LSH) used to be known as the best place to work in western Kansas. People enjoyed working as a team and were proud of the reputation for excellent patient care.

In about 2004, morale started to slip when a superintendent was hired from out of state. This new administrator created many new, high-paying, positions and filled them with friends from outside Kansas. LSH was put at risk of losing accreditation under this leadership team after disastrous surveys. This superintendent was called before a joint committee due to the accreditation risk, and was eventually asked to resign by the secretary of SRS.

Since that time, there have been several superintendents, a reorganization of state departments, and several changes of cabinet level secretaries. In short, there has been no consistent leadership team. With each change, the new personnel have had to try to pick up the pieces from long term problems. The current superintendent is an interim.

LSH has gone from being known as the premier employer in rural Kansas, to a place where new nursing students avoid. More new-hires quit before completing OJT than those who complete training. Those who do go beyond OJT do not stay long. Keep in mind that this is a place where people used to make a lifetime career! The main reason a few long term career people stay is their compassion for the patients they treat...and the memory of how things used to be.

Although my personal experience is with LSH, it is obvious that OSH is having serious problems of its own. Both hospitals are in serious need of legislative attention.

The members of this oversight committee would be the legislators elected from the districts that host the state hospitals, and the legislators directly involved in health issues and appropriations. It's time to take the bull by the horns and get the situation turned around at both state psychiatric hospitals.

I ask your support for SB 477.