

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS HOSPITAL

Bob Page
President and Chief Executive Officer
Hospital Executive Office

Proponent Testimony **Bob Page, MBA, CPA** **H.B. 2150** **February 2, 2017**

Chairman Barker and members of the committee:

I'm Bob Page, president and chief executive officer of The University of Kansas Health System. I want to first thank this committee for its thoughtful consideration of this very important legislation.

In 1998, the Kansas Legislature worked hard on another important piece of legislation. It was The University of Kansas Hospital Authority Act. This law made it possible for us to thrive. It gave us the freedom to compete in the marketplace, which enabled us to extend the benefits of academic medicine to people throughout Kansas and beyond.

Today we're not only the largest hospital in metropolitan Kansas City and the state of Kansas, we are also one of the nation's top academic medical centers.

We've made a meaningful impact on the health of hundreds of thousands of Kansans and thousands of people from across the country and even around the world. We are committed to delivering world-class care and world-class outcomes to every patient. To achieve this, we've assembled a world-class team. Today our health system is nearly 10,000 strong. These are the best and brightest caregivers and professionals you'll find anywhere.

These physicians, nurses and support staff choose to work at The University of Kansas Health System because they believe in our mission and our commitment to doing what's right for every patient, every time.

This means providing the highest-quality care and the best customer service in a safe and healing environment. This is why HB 2150 is so important to us, and why I'm here today to ask for your support. Without the passage of HB 2150, we will be at a competitive disadvantage. We will be the only hospital in the seven county Kansas City area forced to allow concealed weapons in our facility.

Our patients and our staff are scared.

Patients are already calling us with their concerns after seeing reports in local media. In fact, some have called to say they don't want to be transferred to our hospital because of the possibility of gunfire, even though this law has not yet taken effect.

Our staff is concerned. As a Level I Trauma Center, we take care of gunshot victims and victims of gang violence. In these highly charged, emotional circumstances, imagine what could happen if visitors were permitted to enter the hospital with concealed guns.

We know crime victims are not just patients; they are potential witnesses in court. These are witnesses sometimes a perpetrator would like to have silenced. We also have battered spouses and adolescents who are the victims of domestic violence. Allowing an armed abuser into the hospital puts everyone at risk.

Other patients in our busy ER are suffering strokes, heart attacks and other health crises. The standard advice of "Run, Hide, Fight" in an active shooter situation does not fit a facility which is filled with the sickest of the sick who cannot run, hide or fight.

As you will hear, our commissioned police officers are also concerned about potential scenarios. The last thing they want to see is an active shooter situation with multiple guns, when they have seconds to determine which person is the active shooter and which is the Good Samaritan.

Unfortunately, we have a sad history with gun violence in our hospital. In the 1980s, a resident was killed when someone opened fire in our Emergency Department. We can never forget this experience or allow it to happen again.

We wanted to know what our community thinks about this issue. Last July, we had a long-respected pollster, Public Opinion Strategies, survey 500 registered voters in Wyandotte, Johnson, Leavenworth, Miami and Atchison counties. We frankly didn't know what kind of results we would find.

72 percent of the people in those counties said hospitals should be able to prohibit concealed weapons in their facilities. An even bigger number, 82 percent, believe mental health facilities should have the right to prohibit them.

Every demographic...Republican and Democrat...men and women...young and old...did not want concealed weapons in hospitals. Even gun owners said they did not want concealed weapons in hospitals.

Almost half the voters surveyed said they will feel less safe in hospitals if this law is implemented. Two-thirds of voters said there should be more decision-making by local governments and hospital boards on whether they will allow concealed weapons in hospitals.

The vast majority of our board, our staff and the public we serve do not believe the law permitting concealed weapons in our facilities adds to safety. In fact, we think it compromises safety.

We acknowledge we live in troubled times. This is why we have significantly increased spending for our commissioned police force on campus and increased training for all employees. We also know no system is perfect, and no system can guarantee there will never be an incident.

However, with more police and specially trained response teams called in to defuse situations before they escalate, we believe we have a better solution. This solution is consistent with other nationally ranked academic health systems.

The issue before us today is not about gun control or gun rights. It's about helping The University of Kansas Hospital continue its journey toward becoming a world-class hospital, where we can provide the most innovative, advanced and comprehensive care to the people of Kansas – in a safe environment.

We want to continue to grow – to not only keep the best staff but to add new highly specialized physicians and clinicians. We can't recruit the best and brightest if our staff is afraid for their safety.

We also are committed to being an economic engine for our community. We are incredibly proud of the impact we have had on the economic health of Wyandotte County and the region, and we want to continue to do more. We are honored to be the hospital of choice for people from across the region, but patients won't come to us if they are worried about their safety.

Our future is at risk in so many ways if we allow guns in our hospital.

In 1998, the Kansas Legislature empowered us to become one of the nation's best academic medical centers. Now we ask you to help us keep moving forward. Our focus should be on saving as many lives as possible and doing everything we can to help our patients recover. In this fast-paced, life-or-death environment, when we're doing everything we can for our patients, we shouldn't need to worry about their safety.

The thought of adding guns to this environment is simply incomprehensible.

This is why The University of Kansas Health System respectfully requests your support and passage of HB 2150.

Thank you.