



Kansas Sheriffs' Association

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Testimony to the House Committee on Health and Human Services
On HB 2549- Competency and Elimination of Catchment Areas
February 7, 2018

Committee Members,

The Kansas Sheriff's Association submits neutral testimony on HB 2549.

The KSA believes the proposed changes are in KDADS and local entities best interest to better serve citizens with mental health issues and inmates in need of determination of competency ordered by a court. However, the recommended changes will only be positive if they resolve some of the long wait times facing Osawatomie State Hospital and Larned State Hospital admissions. This includes both emergency commitments as well as competency determinations and restoration.

Regarding mental health commitments at Osawatomie and Larned, due to the shortage of personnel in State hospitals, we want to ensure both hospitals will remain open for service even if catchment areas are removed from State Statute as proposed in this bill. We believe more beds are needed to address this concern not just a change in catchment areas. The Mental Health Task Force study also recommended that more beds were needed to service citizens affected by mental illness and we believe those recommendations should be implemented. Our hope is that the future of mental health care includes state funded regionalization of these crucial services that are needed closer to the local communities.

Regarding competency, county jails have experienced an increase in wait times for both determinations of competency and competency restoration. These wait times mean increased time for these defendants in county jail and a delay of justice for crime victims. Only if allowing both Osawatomie and Larned hospitals to provide these services results in increased capacity of the system and reduces wait times will it be a positive change.

The Kansas Sheriff's Association is neutral on the bill as written. We thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill.

Sheriff Jeffrey T. Easter
Legislative Chair for the Kansas Sheriff's Association