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**Testimony To The House Committee on Local Government
Supporting HB 2137**

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Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Stephen Duerst and I represent Federico Consulting. We come today on behalf of the Kansas State Firefighters Association (KSFFA), and stand in wholehearted support of HB 2137. This bill will allow county commissioners and members of city governing bodies to continue to serve as members of local volunteer fire departments and EMS departments.

Volunteers across America number in the hundreds of thousands and the dollar value of the services they provide have been estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Most of our communities in Kansas struggle to keep enough volunteers on their ranks to ensure that fire trucks and ambulances are staffed when the emergency calls arise. And in many of our smallest of communities, the entire city governing body may be serving on the volunteer emergency service agency.

Unfortunately, a recent attorney general ruling has determined that county commissioners and members of city governing bodies can no longer serve their communities as volunteer firefighters and EMTs. We are not suggesting that the opinion is wrong, but simply that the underlying law needs to be fixed. There is no reason that a member of city council, city commission, county commission or a mayor should not be allowed to continue to volunteer their time to their community to help when their citizens need it most.

When citizens call 9-1-1, they expect someone to answer the call and handle their emergency. In the majority of the communities in this state, that means that some community member has to volunteer to serve the fire department or EMS agency. In many communities those people that are the active members of the community not only volunteer their time to serve on the fire department or EMS agency, but they also serve on these elected boards. Instead of “punishing” a person for serving their community in many different ways, we need to find ways to encourage this service. Please pass this bill so that the citizens of this state continue to be protected by dedicated, involved volunteers.