



**KANSAS**  
ASSOCIATION OF  
**COUNTIES**

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Testimony of the Kansas Association of Counties to the  
Senate Committee on Public Health & Welfare  
Proponent for HB 2549 (Mental Health Services) • March 6, 2018

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2549, which addresses access to evaluations regarding competency to stand trial. The original HB 2549 included the elimination of catchment areas that direct inmates to the Larned State Hospital or the Osawatomie State Hospital depending on the county of incarceration. The catchment portion of the bill caused our counties concern, but the amended version has our full support. The change moved KAC from neutral on the bill to its current proponent status.

We welcome changes that decrease the necessary time to evaluate competency because it could decrease incarceration time in county jails. Expanding options to conduct competency examinations will in turn save counties money. The interplay between county jails and mental health is challenging and of great cost. Our hope is that the change in HB 2549 will improve access to evaluations.

Regarding the catchment policy no longer in HB 2549, KAC will note its concern with eliminating the catchment areas. When our counties have to transport inmates over long distances, it forces law enforcement to leave the county. The time and expense of having one and often two officials transport a prisoner is a significant cost in itself. But particularly for our rural counties, this can leave a significant portion of the community without adequate coverage to address law-enforcement needs because there is not additional staff to serve during the transport. The catchment area does not cure this concern, but it places a sensible directive that western counties will send inmates west and eastern counties will send inmates east. For these reasons, we ask this committee to consider keeping the current catchment language on the books.

When it comes to complex and layered issues like law enforcement and community mental health, KAC operates with deference to experts like the Kansas Sheriffs' Association and the Association of CMHCs of Kansas. As such, we agree with their assessment of this legislation. Yet we can also pass on the themes we have heard from county officials who must work with the policy implications of these laws, and we ask this committee to keep the county's costs in mind when deciding on HB 2549.

Respectfully,

Nathan Eberline  
Kansas Association of Counties