



RILEY COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT

To reduce crime and improve the quality of life for the citizens we serve

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January 17, 2022

The Honorable Representative John Barker, Chairman
And Members of the Committee on Federal and State Affairs
Kansas House of Representatives
State Capitol Room 346 S

Re: House Concurrent Resolution No. 5022

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing in opposition to the proposed resolution and subsequent amendment efforts to the Kansas Constitution reference this matter. Although the resolution as submitted preserves the Riley County Police Department, we all know that Bills can be amended without warning and this provision could be stripped from the Bill. Aside from the additional issue of diminishing local control, there are other reasons for my opposition which are outlined below.

Law enforcement services are expensive everywhere and excellent services can cost more, but it doesn't in Riley County because of consolidation and accreditation. I often refer to the late Donn Everett as the founding father of the RCPD. He was the former Riley County Attorney, State Representative, House Majority Floor Leader and State Senator. His broad experience as a city commissioner, county attorney and legislative leader provided the unique perspective to create such a model.

Just like the founding fathers of this great nation, Mr. Everett's vision and brilliance over 45 years ago led to a radical transformation by consolidating local law enforcement that remains unconventional and incredibly brilliant today. The Riley County Police Department (RCPD) may be the only model like it in the country and I'm unsure if Mr. Everett could have accomplished this in today's political climate. Donn Everett was concerned about disparate levels of competence, training and professionalism among the sheriff's office and other two local police departments. In the 1970's, he convinced the voter's not once, but twice that there was a better way. He was right, and it was made even better in 1991 when the RCPD became the first Kansas law enforcement agency to earn international accreditation. This means that the police department is accountable for adhering to the best practices in law enforcement. Accreditation is voluntary and only 5% of all law enforcement agencies in this country have embraced this standard, there are only 11 in Kansas, including the Ottawa PD where I previously served for 14 years. All three Departments I ever served in are accredited.

During my four decades in municipal law enforcement, with the last three years at the RCPD, it is fair to say that I have no sacred cows to protect here. But I do have a deep



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commitment and appreciation for professional policing designed to withstand political interference, fads like "defunding", unwarranted attacks based upon events elsewhere in our country, and other claims and assumptions predicated on misinformation. Predictable and stable funding, mutually respectful relationships based on trust and competence among the various entities served by the RCPD, are critically important ingredients that have led to a top-notch police department serving Riley County. The Riley County Law Enforcement Agency, aka: The Law Board, serves as a de-facto citizens' oversight group of people appointed by Manhattan and Riley County local elected officials to ensure that the aforementioned benefits to its citizens are protected. They have the responsibility of setting the budget, appointing the Director and approving policy. Some Law Board members are also the same officials elected by both jurisdictions.

During my 42 years of police experience, when approved police budget streams are suddenly interrupted or permanently reduced without properly weighing the consequences, it creates a scenario where the training standards demanded by concerned citizens decline over time leading to the kind of service they condemn elsewhere. Also, it makes it harder to attract and retain the kind of police officers that these same citizens demand. If police officers feel unsupported they will go somewhere else to find it. Citizens may not notice the degradation right away, but I guarantee that you will notice it over time and once it reaches a certain point it can take years to recover.

When compared with other Kansas counties who have similar demographics and services provided by multiple law enforcement agencies I have found that the cost of operating the RCPD is 5-10 percent less. Based upon KBI data, Riley County enjoys the added benefit of crime rates that have remained lower than the state average every year since 2003, maybe longer. This lower cost of policing translates into millions of dollars in annual savings and doesn't even factor in the drastically lower number of RCPD police officers needed per capita which is 1.5 per 1,000 residents instead of the national average of 2.0 per 1,000. That would equate to another 40 police officers on the payroll and require a few more million dollars in annual funding. The ratio of law enforcement officers in Kansas per thousand residents is much higher than the national average.

I ask you to take me at my word that Riley County citizens are served by one of the most genius creations I have ever seen in U.S. local law enforcement. Maintaining this model is a no-brainer and will preserve the safety of Riley County citizens for many years to come. I urge you to not take the option of local control away from all Kansas citizens regarding their preference for law enforcement services.

Sincerely,



Dennis P. Butler
Director