

Testimony on HB 2165
To
The Financial Institutions & Pensions Committee

By Roger Werholtz
Secretary
Kansas Department of Corrections
February 25, 2019

Members of the committee:

The Kansas Department of Corrections urges favorable consideration to HB 2165.

I am writing to urge favorable consideration of HB 2165. During my previous tenure as Secretary of Corrections, the department had encouraged adding certain corrections personnel to the Kansas Police and Fire retirement system. The job performed by corrections personnel is physically, mentally and emotionally demanding. It takes a toll on the men and women who work in our agency to keep their fellow Kansans safe. It carries risks comparable to those encountered by police and firefighters, but their duties are performed out of the sight of the public and have, in my opinion, been overlooked for far too long.

As you well know, we are experiencing a critical shortage in our ranks at this time, so severe that I recently was compelled to declare an emergency for El Dorado Correctional Facility. We are struggling to fill positions at almost all of our correctional facilities and field offices. We have spoken to our employees and know that salaries, benefits and working conditions not only attract people to employment but are important in motivating them to continue to work in this service. We have not kept up with our competitors. We need any and every incentive we can get to attract and retain the best people available. We believe this would be another important tool to assist us in that effort.

Over the last few weeks, I have been showing pictures of our employees and our facilities and the challenges they have faced and are continuing to confront. Our parole officers contact and confront offenders under oftentimes dangerous circumstances – many times with the bad news that an offender needs to return to prison for non-compliance of the terms of their release.

It is my belief that the more you, as policy makers, know and see about what our staff's work is like, the better and more informed decisions you can make. I am again providing a set of photographs of our employees to give you a sense of why it is appropriate to include them in the KP&F system. Some of these pictures were taken during my previous tenure as Secretary from 2002 to 2010. Other are much more recent, but the story remains the same. Corrections personnel perform important roles in very difficult and challenging environments, and they deserve the same consideration we have shown to other law enforcement personnel and firefighters.

I have attached a balloon amendment to incorporate parole officers into this bill. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Staff Batteries



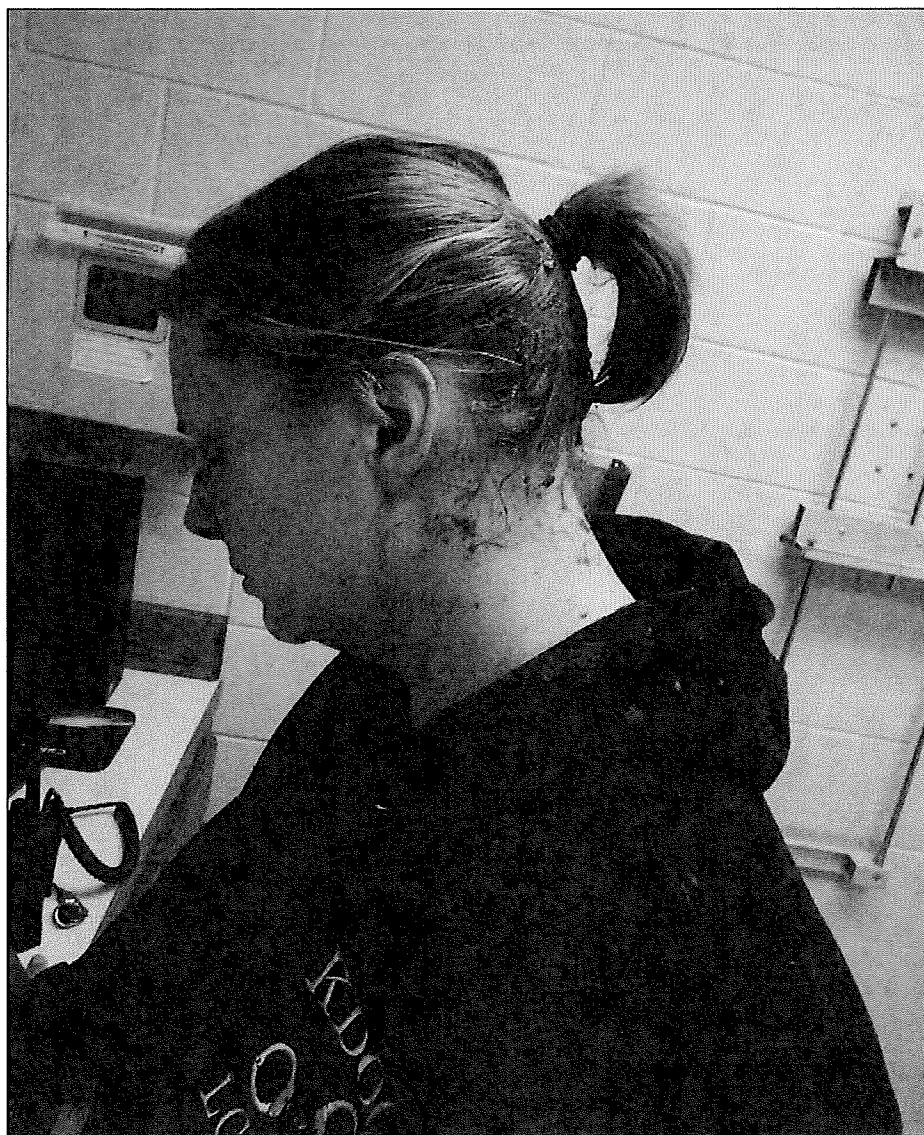
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