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**Testimony in Support of House Bill 2613
Presented to the Senate Committee on Education**

**By Special Agent Randy Combs, Kansas
Statewide D.A.R.E Coordinator and Sara
Hortensine, Division Chief of Youth Services,
Office of the Attorney General**

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Senator Baumgardner and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2613. The Kansas D.A.R.E. program has been present in Kansas for over 25 years and serves to keep our children on the path to success. In 1999, the legislature established a statewide D.A.R.E. coordinator position, which is appointed and sponsored by the Kansas Attorney General's Office.

The D.A.R.E. program in Kansas has many times had to shift its work and its messaging to be relevant and well received by the students and schools that it serves. As many are aware, D.A.R.E. is a police officer-led series of classroom lessons that teaches children from kindergarten through 12th grade how to resist peer pressure and live productive drug and violence-free lives. D.A.R.E. stands for **Drug Abuse Resistance Education** and is an acronym used in the D.A.R.E. decision-making model, **Define Assess, Respond and Evaluate**. The vision for D.A.R.E. is "A world in which students everywhere are empowered to respect each other and choose to lead lives free from violence, substance use and other dangerous behaviors"

The role of the Statewide D.A.R.E. Coordinator is to ensure that we have enough certified officers who are trained to teach and provide mentorship to more than 510,000 K-12 students who are learning and growing in our state. Presently, Kansas has 150 certified D.A.R.E. officers who are present and providing D.A.R.E.'s evidence based curriculum in over 100 school districts across Kansas.

When I became a certified D.A.R.E. Officer in 1998, the biggest threats to our youth were gangs and crystal methamphetamine. Those threats still exist, but presently we have a crisis on

our hands in the form of Fentanyl. While some Kansans know that “one pill can kill” many are unaware that Fentanyl is killing children at an alarming rate, right here in Kansas.

Data from the Kansas Child Death Review Board indicates that for children under the age of 18, drug-related deaths have shown a significant increase in the past two years with **20 times more deaths from Fentanyl in 2020 and 2021 than there were in the three years prior combined.**

Under the direction of Attorney General Kris Kobach, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation has launched a targeted campaign against Fentanyl distribution throughout the state. In January of this year, KBI Director Tony Mattivi met with the Kansas Board of Education at their request to learn more about this issue.

As times have changed, so have the needs of our Kansas children and youth. As introduced, HB 2613 will bring forward funding to support the work of D.A.R.E. to include a statewide educator who will be charged with ensuring Fentanyl awareness campaigns and pre-existing evidence based curriculum are in our schools and the deadly consequences of this drug and others is taught in an age appropriate way to K-12 students in Kansas.

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