



The Kansas District Judges' Association



SENATE TRANSPARENCY AND ETHICS COMMITTEE

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Chief Judge Merlin G. Wheeler
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WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 2096

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of HB 2096. I am Merlin G. Wheeler, Chief Judge of the Fifth Judicial District (Lyon and Chase Counties) and a member of the Executive Committee of the Kansas District Judges Association (KDJA). I also serve as one of three Legislative Co-Chairs of the association along with Chief Judge Thomas Kelly Ryan of the 10th Judicial District and Chief Judge Glenn R. Braun of the 23rd Judicial District. The Hon. Daniel D. Creitz, Chief Judge of the 31st Judicial District currently serves as President of KDJA.

It is our pleasure to offer testimony in support of HB 2096. This bill amends the Kansas Open Records Act to permit Judicial Branch employees to request that public agencies restrict public access to certain identifying information that is maintained on public websites.

We join with the Office of Judicial Administration's testimony detailing instances of inappropriate contacts being made with Judicial Branch employees by various organizations and individuals including, but not limited to, criminal defendants and inmates in custody of the Secretary of Corrections. These examples and those that can be detailed by other organizations clearly illustrate the need for this legislation.

This bill, unlike many, carries with it no fiscal impact on the Judicial Branch, the Office of the Attorney General, Office of Administrative Appeals and the Department of Corrections. Although it may have some fiscal impact on municipalities or counties, that impact would be minimal considering the potential protections offered our employees.

HB 2096 was passed by the House of Representatives to Senate consideration by unanimous vote. We urge similar favorable consideration by this Committee.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of KDJA,

Merlin G. Wheeler, Chief Judge, 5th Judicial District.

Thomas Kelly Ryan, Chief Judge, 10th Judicial District.

Glenn R. Braun, Chief Judge, 23rd Judicial District.