



Kansas Press Association, Inc.

Dedicated to serving and advancing the interests of Kansas newspapers

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Feb. 20, 2017

To: Rep. Russ Jennings, chair of the House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice

From: Doug Anstaett, executive director, Kansas Press Association

Re: Testimony in opposition to HB 2338

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I am Doug Anstaett, executive director of the Kansas Press Association. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our newspaper association's opposition to language in House Bill 2338 that would close the public comment sessions of the Prisoner Review Board involving victims and their families.

Kansas prides itself on having an open and transparent court system. Legislators in the past have made forward-thinking decisions designed to ensure there are checks and balances to the state's immense police powers. Conducting court proceedings in the light of day is one of the ways we accomplish this.

Yet, HB 2338 seeks to chip away at this by barring the public from attending and participating in a continuing court function. In addition, it modifies a provision in the Kansas Open Meetings Act, which raises even more our level of concern.

While crimes certainly do have the greatest personal effect on victims and their families, they are also crimes against society. In fact, we classify them as offenses against the state. Citizens have a right to participate in this review, in public, because the outcome of the hearing is of public interest and it will affect society whichever way the board decides to act. These public forums are the way the public keeps an eye on its criminal justice system and determines whether it is working properly.

We do not arrest, charge and convict our citizens behind closed doors, so it doesn't make sense that we would review an inmate's request for release in a closed session. To allow victims and their families to testify behind closed doors would deny the public some of the information it needs to judge its justice system.

On behalf of the 200 members of the Kansas Press Association, I ask that you reject this language and continue to conduct the activities of the prison review board out in the open, where they belong. Thank you.