

Testimony from Wes McKain, acting COVID Vaccination Resources Manager, Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, KS Public Health Department, in support of **HB2226 — Requiring certain criminal convictions to be expunged from an offender's record automatically.**

2/8/2021

### **Verbal testimony**

- Hi my name is Wes McKain, I am acting COVID Vaccination Resources Manager at the Unified Government Public Health Department. [**Hence my background, onsite at a vaccination site!**]
- I am testifying in support of HB2226.
- Thank the committee for the opportunity to testify and thank Rep. Pam Curtis for her work with us on this expungement issue.
- I am going to tell you a short story about how a local public health department and a local economic development agency came to work so closely together. I think it's a compelling one.
- In 2017 we did a very extensive survey of community needs and priorities as part of our 5-year community health assessment.
- This included a "community concerns" survey of over 2000 residents.
- One of the issues that emerged from that community concerns survey, as well as the economic and health data we collected in the assessment, was **the lack of access to living wages jobs for our residents.**
- How on earth, you might ask, would a Public Health Department begin to work on issues like this? [**We hire people, but we don't help other people hire people!**] Turns out, we weren't the only ones hearing about this issue!
- The Wyandotte Economic Development Council was already convening a Workforce Solutions Committee. They were hearing from employers having difficulty filling jobs in our county, about a similar set of issues.
- So a partnership was formed. We worked together to develop and publish a Jobs & Education plan within the 2018-2023 Wyandotte County Community Health Improvement Plan.
- The plan took the approach of identifying barriers to access to living wage jobs; then created strategies to help remove those barriers.
- In this process, an employment barrier got identified that we were curious about: there were a lot of people eligible for expungement under Kansas law of their past criminal offenses, who were not following through to get their records expunged.
- That curiosity is what led me here today, to be testifying in support of HB2226. I'm not the most knowledgeable of the details of the expungement system, others know more. But of all the methods I've researched to help remove this barrier for our residents, I believe the thoughtful and careful implementation of **automatic expungement** in Kansas is the most efficient solution. Thanks for this opportunity to testify today.