

Katie Wells Testimony

January 25,2021

Good morning and thank you for having me here today. It is an honor to be here and speak about Senate Bill 2063.

My name is Katie Wells. My husband, Michael Wells, was a firefighter, fire investigator, and lieutenant for the City of Lenexa, Kansas. He was also a loving husband, father, son, brother and friend. On October 19, 2018, at the young age of 38, Michael was diagnosed with Stage 4 Esophageal cancer after being employed with the City of Lenexa Fire Department for 13 years. He fought a courageous battle and passed away on September 14,2019. This was just two days after his 39th birthday.

Michael loved being a firefighter and had dreamed of this career since he was a very young boy. He had a servant's heart and gave his whole self to his job, his city, and the people of Lenexa. Being a fire wife, I always worried Michael might not come home from a fire. I knew he would lay down his life for anyone who needed him. I never dreamed he could get cancer and slowly and painfully die from his job. I didn't know before his diagnosis that cancer is the number one killer for fire fighters.

When Michael got sick, he was on short term disability and then forced to medical out. His pay was cut in half and the bills continued to roll in for all his treatments. We were walking through hell as we continued to fight against this terminal cancer. I am a first grade teacher, and I was trying to work and take care of Michael. With three young children not working wasn't an option. We were struggling. The job that Michael gave his entire self to was now turning its back on us. They would not recognize that this was most likely caused from work from the hours Michael spent on fires or investigating fires after they were put out. He was breathing in toxins and chemicals. He was sent to the hospital several times for burns and smoke inhalation on a fire. We were on our own. And then when he passed away, I was cut to one fourth of a firefighter's salary to care for my three young children and save for college. The job Michael laid his life down for was now not supporting him or his family.

I'm here today in hopes that another family will never have to deal with what my kids and I are dealing with daily. My daughters, Caroline and Olivia, will never be able to attend another father daughter dance or have their daddy walk them down the aisle at their wedding. My son, Johnny, will never get to go fishing with his dad or have his dad at one of his baseball games. Michael gave his life to his job. He was willing to do this because he believed in helping others. He also believed his family would always be taken care of if he lost his life from something related to work.

I hope you will listen to my story and show your support for Senate Bill. 2063. Thank you for your time today.