



Joe Norwood, Secretary

Sam Brownback, Governor

Testimony on HB 2338
To
The House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

By Joe Norwood
Secretary
Kansas Department of Corrections
February 20, 2017

The Department of Corrections supports HB 2338. HB 2338 provides an opportunity to victims of crime or their surviving family members to privately express their experiences, opinions and feelings in person to members of the Prisoner Review Board (PRB) considering the release of an offender. Additionally, providing a private comment session to crime victims promotes the safety at the comment sessions.

The Prisoner Review Board through interactions with the paroling authorities of other states discovered that it is an anomaly by conducting comment sessions in which both the people who support the release of an offender and those opposing the release attend the same meeting. In light of this, the National Institute of Corrections provided the PRB the opportunity to meet with the Ohio Parole Board and discuss their private comment session experience. The PRB found private victim comment sessions created an increased level of safety for all parties and allowed victims to provide more authentic and relevant feedback to board members.

The victim services division of the department has also surveyed crime victims regarding their experience with the public comment sessions. The PRB determines the release of offenders convicted of Off Grid felonies, which include first degree murder and rape of a child under the age of 14. The discussion of those crimes are traumatic for the victim and their family and is particularly difficult in front of strangers or the friends and family of the offender. Victims report they have been threatened and photographed by the family of offenders after comment sessions. Victims also feel intimidated knowing that anything they say can get back to the inmate.

The department urges favorable consideration of HB 2338.