

Kansas Department of  
Social and Rehabilitation Services  
Don Jordan, Secretary



House Appropriations Committee

February 27, 2008

HB 2673 – RN KPERS Exemption for Hospitals

Osawatomie State Hospital  
Greg Valentine, Superintendent

For Additional Information Contact:  
Dustin Hardison, Director of Public Policy  
Docking State Office Building, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor North  
(785) 296-3271

## HB 2673 – RN KPERS Exemption for Hospitals

### House Appropriations Committee February 27, 2008

Chairwoman Schwartz and members of the Committee, I am Greg Valentine, Superintendent of Osawatomie State Hospital. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss HB 2673.

This bill amends K.S.A. 2007 Supp. 74-4914 which allows retired registered nurses (RN's) who return to work in state institutions an exemption from salary limits, so that they may receive KPERS retirement benefits. SRS supports HB 2673 because it removes the exemption's sunset date of June 30, 2008.

Under K.S.A. 2007 Supp. 74-4914, Larned State Hospital, Osawatomie State Hospital and Rainbow Mental Health Facility have employed 19 retired RN's since July 1, 2005. Today we have 11 retired RN's on staff in these institutions. These RN's represent 6 % of the 177 total nurses currently employed by the three state mental health hospitals.

The average hourly rate for an RN is \$22.29. At that rate of pay, the average RN has to work about 897 hours, or 22 weeks, before reaching the \$20,000 maximum allowed by statute.

SRS supports HB 2673, as it provides state hospitals with an additional resource to recruit and retain qualified and experienced nurses. A retired RN returning to work can be placed immediately into the staff rotation and provide immediate direct patient care. Experienced nurses already possess a working knowledge of the hospital and nursing policies which can improve continuity of care for the patients. In contrast, a nurse without prior experience must undergo a required six week orientation, be assigned to a mentor, and have one year of nursing experience to become a Registered Nurse Senior.

New nursing standards have exacerbated the statewide nursing shortage. As of October 2007, a new graduate from nursing school cannot practice nursing until he or she has passed the state nursing board and obtained their license. This change in practice has eliminated the hospital's ability to recruit RN's directly out of nursing schools.

The state hospitals are in strong competition for Registered Nurses. Because mental health nursing is a specialty and the ability to recruit directly out of nursing schools has been eliminated, our mostly rural state hospitals remain challenged to recruit and retain well qualified, experienced RN's. HB 2673 gives our state hospitals one additional resource to meet that challenge.

I would be glad to stand for any questions from the Committee.