

HCS HB 2207 -- WITNESS PROTECTION PROGRAMS

SPONSOR: Patterson

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Judiciary by a vote of 16 to 0.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 2207.

This bill creates the "Pretrial Witness Protection Services Fund". This bill authorizes the Department of Public Safety to disburse money from the Pretrial Witness Protection Services Fund to law enforcement agencies for the purposes of providing for the security of witnesses, potential witnesses, and their immediate families in criminal proceedings or investigations. Funds will be subject to appropriations from the General Assembly.

The law enforcement agencies must submit an application to the Department of Public Safety, which shall include, but is not limited to, the following information:

- (1) A statement of conditions that qualify persons for protection;
- (2) Precise methods the agency will use to provide protection; and
- (3) A statement of projected costs over a specified period of time.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that this creates a witness protection fund, and a million dollars has already been appropriated this year. Department of Public Safety will allocate the funds to various law enforcement agencies in the state so they can protect witnesses to violent crimes. There has been a big drop in witness cooperation because there is no way to protect them, so this creates a mechanism. People on social media brag about what they will do to those who cooperate with investigations. The current witness protection program is completely inadequate because there are insufficient funds to cover the actual needs for this program. Plus, they have to wait at least 48 hours to protect someone because the whole board has to consider whether to grant it.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Patterson; City of Kansas City; Mayor Lucas, City of Kansas City; Missouri Department

of Public Safety; Missouri Association of Prosecuting Attorneys; Missouri Office Prosecutor Service; Lance Bolinger, Columbia Police Department; Civic Progress Action Committee; Lt. Col. Ronnie Robinson, St. Louis Metro Police Department; Major Steve Young, Kansas City Police Department; City of Springfield; Mayor McClure, City Of Springfield; and Police Chief Williams; City of Springfield.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.