

Governor Laura Kelly October 25, 2021

Office of the Governor

Capitol, 300 SW 10th Ave., Ste. 241S

Topeka, KS 66612-1590

Sheriff Brian J. Bellendir Et al.

Barton County Sheriff's Office

1416 Kansas Ave.

Great Bend, Kansas 67530

Honorable Governor Laura Kelly:

I am writing on behalf of myself and several other duly elected and sworn Sheriffs who have signed this letter. It is our experience that the operations and management at Larned State Hospital have reached a crisis level. Over the last several years, the leadership has created a culture that has become a quagmire of red tape and bureaucracy. This places the public at risk and obstructs law enforcement. We have three main areas of concern.

Escapes

We wish to call to your attention the escape of John Colt and at least two other individuals. Mr. Colt was considered a violent and dangerous sexual predator. He escaped from the "Sexual Predator Treatment Program" located on the Larned campus. The administrators of this program failed to contact law enforcement for more than five hours after it was evident there was a problem. Colt was later arrested in Utah in September.

Furthermore, when Sheriff King of Pawnee County attempted to investigate the escape, the administrative staff refused to assist, compelling Sheriff King to obtain and execute several search warrants simply to obtain video and documents relating to the escape. At one point, KDADS's legal department suggested getting a protective order against the Sheriff! During Sheriff King's investigation, three employees were arrested for aiding John Colt in his escape. It is now clear why the administration did not want Sheriff King investigating the incident.

After Mr. Colt's escape, there were two subsequent escapes, one occurring in Hutchinson the other occurring in the City of Larned. Both individuals were captured by local law enforcement in a very short period of time. Three escapes in a matter of months are unacceptable.

KDADS "Catchment Area"

Recently, an individual was taken into protective custody in Barton County. The person was obviously in a mental crisis. He was hallucinating, standing in the middle of a rural highway yelling at nonexistent people. The subject was taken into protective custody and evaluated as well as medically screened. It was unclear if the individual was living in his car.

However, his driver's license showed an address in a city in northeastern Kansas. Because he was outside of the Larned "catchment area," my office was advised we must transport him to the Osawatomie facility because Larned was "almost full". Osawatomie is more than 200 miles from Barton County, Larned State Hospital is 30 miles. This is absurd. Only after repeated calls to the superintendent at Larned did they accepted the patient. I was advised by the superintendent the

patient would most likely be transported Osawatomie by LSH staff. It was pointed out if this person was in my custody because of criminal charges Larned would have accepted them. This is just one more example of red tape and bureaucracy.

Refusal of patients

There are a couple of other incidents you should be aware of. Recently, I had an inmate charged with a very serious crime who became extremely violent and self-abusive to the point of smashing their face into cement walls in a holding cell. The inmate was removed, restrained, and evaluated. Mental health professionals completed the proper paperwork to admit the individual to the state hospital at Larned. This was on a Friday afternoon. Due to "no available beds" the inmate was not transported to Larned State Hospital until late Sunday morning. During the waiting period before admission, the inmate had to be restrained. Any time this individual was released from the restraints (restroom, eating, etc.) she became violent, and several officers were required to once again prevent harm to the inmate.

Sheriff Bill Carr from Ford County experienced a situation in which a patient was medically cleared for admission to the state hospital at Larned three times. He still met resistance from the staff at the state hospital at Larned. An inmate had become very violent and was in a mental crisis. He had also claimed to have eaten some foreign objects. The inmate was medically screened before leaving Dodge City. The inmate then stated he had eaten more foreign objects while in the transport van. The inmate was again examined at the hospital in Larned and sent on the Great Bend to be scoped. No foreign objects were found at any of the medical care facilities. During transportation, the inmate managed to kick out a rear window in one patrol car and damage the headliner, radar, and emergency lighting in another. Upon arrival at the state hospital, the inmate told a security guard he had eaten glass. The security officer opted to refuse the inmate even though Sheriff King and Sheriff Carr were both present explaining that this had not happened. After a prolonged conversation, Sheriff King contemplated arresting the security guards for obstruction of a law enforcement officer. Once again, the superintendent was called, and the patient was accepted by Larned. At a later date, the patient was transported to the hospital in Larned by one LSH staff member. The patient was one of the above-mentioned escapees.

There are numerous incidents in which law enforcement agencies have had to sit with citizens who are in a mental health crisis in lobbies or briefing rooms at sheriff's offices and police departments for hours or days. This is a dis-service to Kansans in need of help.

The anecdotal evidence could fill volumes. Almost every law enforcement agency in Western Kansas continues to have problems with services at the state hospital. As Sheriffs, we understand issues concerning staffing and Covid 19 related problems. We are faced with the same issues every day in our county jails. That said, we will continue to do our job. Larned State Hospital must also.

Interpretation of policies and procedure begins at the top. There appears to be a culture at the state hospital that resists the admission of patients. Further, we have found these issues are exasperated on weekends. Leadership and accountability are key to the culture of any organization. Under the current regime at the Larned State Hospital, it is our opinion that the public is in danger and there is a continued disservice to those who are mentally ill. Therefore, we must firmly insist on a change of leadership at the administrative level at Larned State Hospital. Your prompt attention in this matter would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Brian Bellendir Scott King Bill Carr
Sheriff, Barton County Sheriff, Pawnee County Sheriff, Ford County
Fred Whitman Jerry Montagne Robert Craft
Russell County McPherson County Marion County
Jeff Herrig Greg Taylor Darrin Campbell
Jefferson County Neosho County Reno County
Bill Martin Chris Wells Bryant Evans
Bourbon County Osage County Rice County
Frank Kelly Tim Morse Donald Ash
Miami County Jackson County Wyandotte County
Jack Lucke Troy Haas Monty Hughes
Wilson County Decatur County Butler County
Calvin Hayden Robert Murrow John Ketron
Johnson County Stafford County Clark County
Justin Cordry Jeffrey McCullough Bryan Murphy
Washington County Woodson County Allen County
Tracy Chance Michael Warren Rob Hoskins
Harper County Finney County Wabaunsee County
Brandon Mitchell Jeffrey Richards David Falletti
Ness County Franklin County Cowley County
Mike Lehl John Walker Kendal Lothman
Comanche County Elk County Kiowa County
Shawn Mesch Doug Ritter Chris Wells
Gove County Meade County Coffey County
Tom Nickols Jeff Sharp Ray Unruh
Thomas County Gray County Wallace County
Thomas Johnson Jason LeClair David Horner
Coffey County Barber County Kearny County
Alan Benninga Roger Soldan Chad Gray
Clay County Saline County Harvey County
Richard Newby Jay Simecka Dustin Florence
Chautauqua County Morris County Lincoln County

Jeff Easter Bryon Kough Jay Armbrister

Sedgwick County Lane County Douglas County

Shelby Ralstin Gary Knight John Merchant

Morton County Rooks County Brown County

Timothy Ackerman Charles Radabaugh Randy Hill

Marshall County Phillips County Kingman County

Kevin Friend Robbyn Hodgs

Linn County Rawlins County