

KANSAS MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

An Organization Dedicated to Improving the Lives of Kansans with Mental Illnesses

Written Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee For HB 2676 – Assisting Suicide

Amy A. Campbell – February 8, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to address your committee today on behalf of the Kansas Mental Health Coalition (KMHC). The Kansas Mental Health Coalition is dedicated to improving the lives of Kansans living with Mental Illnesses and Severe Emotional Disorders. We are consumer and family advocates, provider associations, direct services providers, non-profit and for-profit entities and others who share a common mission. At monthly roundtable meetings, participants develop and track a consensus agenda that provides the basis for legislative advocacy efforts each year. This format enables many groups, that would otherwise be unable to participate in the policy making process, to have a voice in public policy matters that directly affect the lives of their constituencies. The opportunity for dialogue and the development of consensus makes all of us stronger and more effective in achieving our mission.

The country has experienced a troubling increase in communications encouraging individuals to end their lives. The Kansas Mental Health Coalition supports legislation to discourage actions to coerce and bully individuals who are in crisis to end their lives.

The Coalition encourages a statewide conversation about prevention and the many factors that can influence the decision making of people who are experiencing suicidal thoughts.

We know that people who experience suicidal thoughts can and do move beyond these moments and lead happy lives. We know that not all suicide attempts are fatal. However, the interactions that occur during times of crisis can have tragic results – ending young lives and devastating families.

There is more to be done to educate people, young and old, to understand their words matter.

This is also an issue for those who work in mental health. They must choose their words carefully, utilizing training to guide the use of appropriate and hopeful language. A short internet search yields multiple helpful guides for up to date recommended language to use around the topic of suicide.

HB 2676 lists specific communications that rise to the level of illegally assisting suicide. We appreciate the effort to be specific. We are supportive of this approach, while also encouraging full consideration of any possible unintended effects.

We stand ready to participate in conversations around these topics to seek solutions if those concerns do come forward.

Thank you for your consideration.

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