

KANSAS MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

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

Testimony opposing SB 333 to the Senate Education Committee

Amy A. Campbell – February 8, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to address your committee today on behalf of the Kansas Mental Health Coalition. The Kansas Mental Health Coalition is a statewide roundtable grassroots organization dedicated to improving the lives of Kansans living with mental illness and behavioral health needs.

The Coalition opposes SB 333, which was written to remove requirements of the Jason Flatt Act. The Coalition supported the passage of the Jason Flatt Act to train school personnel to identify warning signs, recognize elevated risk factors, learn basic do's and don'ts in helping someone who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide and, all importantly, what resources are available to refer for professional help.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for young people from the ages of 10 to 24, according to the CDC. For Kansas City-area young people in that age group, suicide is the second leading cause of death. (www.kansassuicideprevention.org/data)

Many other young Kansans are affected by suicide risk. The most recent Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) during 2013 reports that for Kansas 9th – 12th grade youth, during the 12 months before completing that YRBSS:

- 8.4% had made at least one suicide attempt,
- 12.5% had made a suicide plan,
- 16.4% had seriously considered suicide, and
- 24% had felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities.

At the time of this writing, we are not aware of the motivations for SB 333. Perhaps, if there are significant problems with the Act, representatives of the schools and the suicide prevention professionals could meet to develop some strategies to address those issues.

I have been honored to serve as a co-chair of the Adult Continuum of Care Task Force and as a member of the Mental Health Task Force established by the 2017 Legislature. Each of these groups released reports with recommendations designed to improve our mental health system with specific attention to the crisis at Kansas mental health hospitals. There is significant work to do to close the gaps in our continuum of care – and the options for suicide prevention are only a very small part of that body of work. The Task Force Report talks about addressing the issues of young people where they are – in school and in their homes.

The Jason Flatt Act is an important preventive measure to equip schools on the front end of a public crisis. Please do not pass SB 333.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

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