



Testimony to House Committee on Education on House Bill 2099

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Mister Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Kyle Kessler, I am the Executive Director for the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc. The Association appreciates the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of House Bill 2099, which would allow school districts to collect information vital to the work preventing substance abuse.

The Association represents the 26 licensed Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in Kansas that provide behavioral health services in all 105 counties in Kansas, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. In Kansas, CMHCs are the local Mental Health Authorities coordinating the delivery of publicly funded community-based mental health services. As part of licensing regulations, CMHCs are required to provide services to all Kansans needing them, regardless of their ability to pay. This makes the community mental health system the “safety net” for Kansans with mental health needs, collectively serving over 127,000 Kansans.

The student data privacy law passed in 2014 as Senate Bill 367 contained provisions that have created a barrier for CMHCs that perform prevention work in their communities. Through the Kansas Communities That Care (KCTC) student survey, CMHCs have been able to target efforts at preventing substance abuse.

The CMHCs in Kansas recognize the concerns about data and privacy and we feel that House Bill 2099 is a good solution. The KCTC survey is completely anonymous, voluntary, and the data is confidential. Requiring written consent to participate in the survey has reduced the response rate and in turn the accuracy of the data.

The KCTC student survey was developed based on research that found that there are specific risk and protective factors in regard to youth and their substance abuse behaviors. Because of the KCTC survey, we are able to prioritize our efforts and address the most relevant issues facing our communities. In this time of ever shrinking resources, the KCTC data helps us prioritize our efforts in areas that are likely to be the most effective.

Most importantly, as efforts to integrate prevention efforts across multiple areas (substance abuse, mental health, suicide, problem gambling) continues to gain traction, this survey identifies multiple areas that cross over these issues. Behavioral health providers who apply for local and federal grants will often use the KCTC data to illustrate their need for additional services.

Any positive impact we can have in preventing youth from abusing alcohol and drugs puts us considerably ahead in the prevention of a myriad of other issues such as school graduation rates, employment rates, unintended pregnancies, health issues, criminal justice involvement, mental health issues, and further strain on the alcohol and drug treatment system.

The Association appreciates this committee taking a look at this very important issue. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.