

Proponent Testimony for Amy Hutchens

To: House Education Committee

Regarding: **Substitute SB 323 Jason Flatt Act for Kansas**

On average, **one person dies by suicide every 20 hours in the state of Kansas. Over three times as many people die by suicide in Kansas annually than by homicide. One out of three suicide deaths is not an individual's first attempt.** In high school, **one in 12 students will attempt suicide each year. Only 33% are seen by a healthcare professional for suicide attempt.**

Beginning in January 2015, Children's Mercy Hospital implemented suicide screenings for depression, to assess suicidal ideation and behavior with a specific plan, and provide staff with better indication of a need for help after losing at least three patients to suicide in November 2014.

The Jason Flatt Act helps school personnel identify the warning signs of students contemplating suicide and teach them how to appropriately handle and report the situation. Our teachers observe and evaluate our student's performance and development, and we trust they will keep an open line of communication with us and keep us informed if our child needs help. I strongly believe the school personnel will do everything they can to support students who are struggling and ensure they are able to take action in a timely manner. If Children's Mercy can implement suicide screenings shortly after losing patients to suicide in November 2014, and they only see patients who are ill or injured, school staff are perfect resources who see **all of our children five days a week all day long.** As a parent of two daughters, I have one daughter who is a teacher and have buried my other daughter due to suicide.

In February 2011, my daughter, Alyssa was a healthy, 13 year old active in all sports, until she was life flighted to Children's Mercy with H1N1 swine flu, and spent the next three years in physical therapy and had to give up her love of sports. In August 2014, Alyssa was hospitalized with a temporary feeding tube, then later notified the tube most likely would be permanent. Alyssa would never eat or drink by mouth again. Alyssa took her life on November 10, 2014, at the age of 16; where I discovered her body as a result of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Her suicide came three days after Ciara Webb, approximately 12 hours after Cady Housch, Cathy's daughter, also 16 year old juniors and patients of Children's Mercy Hospital. All three girls rested together at the Frontier Forensic Morgue while our entire communities remained in shock of their death by suicide.

As parents and school personnel, we need to be able to talk openly to our youth because they think suicide is their only option, and they are thinking in the moment and cannot think past that moment. We need to recognize the signs and be able to get them professional help if it is needed, and this is why the Jason Flatt Act is so important. **Suicide is preventable.**

As a surviving parent of suicide, this is the hardest pain my family as ever endured along with the financial costs of suicide. I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital, diagnosed with PTSD, unable to work, and almost had to medically retire. As I drive past Alyssa's high school every day, I ask myself these questions: Did Alyssa lay in bed at night, cry in pain and then go to school and have to act like nothing was wrong? Did she feel like she couldn't talk to anyone at school? If someone at school would have asked would she have opened up? They saw her five days a week. I DO NOT WANT ANY PARENT TO GO THROUGH WHAT I HAVE GONE THROUGH AND THAT IS WHY I AM HERE TODAY. **If school personnel can save lives, parents will no longer have to bury their children.**