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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 323, THE JASON FLATT ACT
House Education Committee
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I am writing testimony in support of SB 323, The Jason Flatt Act, as the coordinator of the Greater Kansas City Mental Health Coalition. This coalition is made up of 24 local mental health organizations that are combining their efforts to end the stigma associated with mental illness.

In my professional role, I'm met wonderful people. Unfortunately, I've met too many of them because they have lost a child to suicide. It is impossible for me to imagine the pain these parents feel at the loss of their sons or daughters, especially knowing that their deaths were likely preventable.

Mental illness can be difficult to recognize, especially in adolescents. We expect them to be moody, but sometimes these behavior changes mask much more serious issues. We expect them to be secretive, so it's no surprise that they can act like they are fine while also contemplating ending their lives. Sometimes, parents have recognized a problem, but need support from the school and community to get the help they need because they can't keep watch 24 hours a day.

I understand that the Jason Flatt Act is not going to "fix" suicide, but if it prevents even one from occurring, then I would consider it worth the energy. Everyone who is part of a child's life should know what signs to look for and what to say to a student who's hurting. There are probably many days that children spend more waking hours at school than they do at home, so I believe we should give our educators all the tools we can to recognize and respond to serious mental health issues. Students certainly can't be taught successfully if they are suffering from such pain and anguish.

Personally, I am the mom of two girls, ages 12 and 14, who are enrolled in Kansas public schools. I see firsthand the challenges that my daughters and their friends are facing, and they are considerable. As parents, my husband and I have no frame of reference because the world is so completely different than when we were their ages. We see depression, anxiety, and more every day. One daughter has a friend who has been cutting herself; the other has a friend struggling with a volatile family situation; and my own daughter has been bullied by way of texting. It can be overwhelming, and I want my girls to have all the support they can should it all become too much for them to handle.

That's why I strongly support the requirement of one hour of annual suicide prevention training for Kansas educators. **Please support SB 323, the Jason Flatt Act.**