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**Testimony in Support of Substitute Senate Bill 323
Creating the Jason Flatt act;
requiring suicide prevention training for school district personnel.**

**Presented to the House Committee on Education
By Andrew B. Brown, MSW
Executive Director of Headquarters, Inc.**

March 9th, 2016

Chairman Highland and honorable members of the Committee on Education:

Thank you for hearing testimony today in support of the Jason Flatt Act. Today you will hear many stories and facts about suicide among Kansas youths. All of these are intended to persuade you into making the decision to support this bill. It is my sincere hope that after hearing testimony today you will do all that you can to help pass this bill into law.

I'm the Executive Director for Headquarters, Inc. a non-profit organization in Lawrence, where we operate the Kansas Suicide Prevention Resource Center and Headquarters Counseling Center, a National Suicide Prevention Lifeline crisis center which responds to calls and chats from every county in Kansas. In 2012, we were awarded a three year federal grant to establish the Kansas Youth Suicide Prevention program. During those three years our staff trained thousands of Kansans in evidence-based suicide prevention, they helped launch local suicide prevention coalitions in communities around the state, and supported train the trainer programs as well as statewide summits for suicide prevention. Federal funding for the KYSP program has ended and our no-cost extension drew to a close at the end of January.

As the sun sets on this program, the network of trainers and individuals trained by KYSP will continue to have positive impacts on suicide prevention. In less than two years the impact of that training will no longer be felt, if something doesn't change to spur interest in continued training. Many Kansans have completed certifications in first aid or CPR, these are lifesaving trainings that have to be renewed to maintain certification. Suicide prevention training is no different, in order to remain effective, to save the lives of our youth; we need to make sure that training is sustained into the future.

The Kansas Suicide Prevention Plan revised in 2014 and published by KDADS last year states its second goal as:

*"Increase the prevention, intervention and management training of personnel in mental health, behavioral health, **education**, law enforcement and primary care fields."*

This is expanded on throughout the document as being a critical component of the plan's success.

Headquarters, Inc. is the suicide prevention leader in Kansas, providing counseling, education, and resources for all to improve public health.

This bill now before you builds upon the legacy of the KYSP program and encompasses the vision of the new Kansas Suicide Prevention Plan. In addition the bill is in alignment with the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention and the Strategic Prevention Framework.

Earlier this year, KDADS launched PreventionWorkS as part of the Kansas Prevention Collaborative. This statewide coalition of community coalitions from across the state will help combine the prevention efforts in communities to address common risk factors and protective factors of behavioral health as a public health issue. KDADS also announced federal block grant awards to local communities around the state for prevention training as part of the Kansas Prevention Collaborative. As KDADS continues to move forward creating opportunities for local communities to access these federal resources for prevention training, more attention will be paid to local school districts as both a setting where at-risk youth are identified and as a setting where at-risk youth receive ongoing care and suicide risk management services.

SB 323's fiscal note states that there will be **no cost to the state** if it is passed, that any costs of training will be paid by the local school districts. This may seem of concern to school districts, as an unfunded mandate from the state. However there are many ways to fulfill these training requirements which can be accomplished at little to no cost to the school districts. As an example recently some USD 497 employees in Lawrence received free suicide prevention training and certification through the Douglas County Suicide Prevention Coalition and funding it received from the Douglas County Community Foundation. The Jason Flatt Foundation also offers free training to school districts. The Kansas Prevention Collaborative is working on developing online trainings, and KDADS is dedicated to reducing suicide in Kansas.

One great resource available to schools is a book simply titled 'Suicide in Schools', it's both a comprehensive and practical guidebook with clear, step-by-step guidelines on how to work proactively with school personnel and community professionals, think about suicide prevention from a three-tiered systems approach, how to identify those who might be at risk, and how to support survivors after a traumatic event. A single purchase of the book, allows online access to over 40 forms and documents that can be customized for the school district's use. The Kansas Suicide Prevention Resource Center has already begun implementing training that connects schools with this material in Leavenworth. Our resource center staff is also developing suicide prevention training for use by local communities as part of the Kansas Prevention Collaborative.

I hope that it is clear that this legislation is a massive step forward for suicide prevention in Kansas, that the lives we are trying to save are worth more than a few hours of training, and that we can't continue to wait for suicide rates to go down on their own. Our agency will devote its limited resources to continue to try and provide as much quality training in suicide prevention as we can. We feel that it's truly the greatest impact we can make in the lives of Kansas youth at risk for suicide.