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

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

January 26, 2016

Chairman Abrams and honorable members of the Committee on Education:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you 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 to support this bill. It is my sincere hope that after hearing testimony today you will do all 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 (KYSP) program. During those three years, our staff trained thousands of Kansans in evidence-based suicide prevention, 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. Regrettably, federal funding for the KYSP program draws to a close at the end of this month.

As the sun sets on this program, the network of trainers and individuals trained by KYSP will continue to have a positive impact on suicide prevention. But if nothing is done to spur interest in continued training that impact will wane significantly in less than two years. Like CPR or first aid certification, suicide prevention trainings need to be sustained into the future to assure effectiveness and to save the lives of our youth.

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."*

Education is reinforced 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.

The 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.

While school districts and their employees are the target for this suicide prevention bill, we are not asking them to carry sole responsibility for suicide prevention in their communities. **Suicide is a public health issue, and suicide prevention requires a community effort.** Earlier this month, KDADS announced federal block grant awards to communities for prevention training as part of the Kansas Prevention Collaborative. As KDADS continues create opportunities for communities to access federal resources for prevention training, more attention will be paid to 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 concern school districts, as an unfunded mandate from the state. However there are many ways to fulfill these training requirements at little to no cost to the school districts. As an example, USD 497 employees in Lawrence recently received free suicide prevention training and certification through the Douglas County Suicide Prevention Coalition with funding 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 working proactively with school personnel and community professionals, thinking about suicide prevention from a three-tiered systems approach, identifying those who might be at risk, and supporting survivors after a traumatic event. 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 in Leavenworth that connects schools with this material. Our resource center staff is also developing suicide prevention training for use by 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 continuing to 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.