

Testimony on behalf of Betty Brennan, Parent – Oral Proponent for **SB323** – Jason Flatt Act

I believe that Satan can tear a person apart and create darkness over a life that drowns out all good, but in these darkest of times God is there to pick us up and make our tragic events our testimonies. This is where my passion comes from and where my new start begins. On February 26, 2014 my tragic event began. That is the day where I became a parent statistic and my son Kyler Wayne Jones born April 19, 1998 a big brother to Broderick and Sheridan Jones became a youth suicide statistic. We as a family, community, and a nation have come to allow this to take our children because it has been a silent epidemic that no one wants to talk about. As I stood in my 15 year old son's room, 40 minutes after telling him I loved him and to have a good day at school, looking at his lifeless body I made a vow to break the silence.

I'm here supporting the Jason Flatt Act, only hearing about it recently and knowing this is exactly what I have wanted in our schools. The people that spend the most time with our children are the ones who need insight on what they should look for, ways to help, and instructions on guiding our children to a safe place. Recognizing signs aren't easy, and I can say first hand I would never imagined standing here fighting for this cause. My son was a very happy, sports loving, good student, brother, friend, community and most importantly my son! He didn't show the "signs" but was there something that his teachers could have seen that I didn't? The day before he died he choose to eat lunch with one of his favorite teachers, this was very unusual for him. What if she had the training would have she been able to ask the questions that could have changed our story. I wish I could say they did or they could, but rather than wishing for what will not be my reality, hopefully it will be another parent's reality.

Through a small organization "KJ's "I Believe" Fight Against Suicide" to raise awareness for our community to get educated. We have had 2 memorial rides along with auctions to raise money to for awareness. This last year we were able to bring youth motivational speaker, Jeff Yalden to our community. In bringing him to our local schools we found that our teachers don't feel that they are equipped to handle a mental health emergency, nor detect a child in need. After the death of Kyler our local schools found themselves without answers to the questions our entire community had. How did we miss it? What could have we done? Where did we go wrong? What do we do to prevent this from happening again? How do we help our student body to cope and heal? There is a huge myth in our community in reference to talking about suicide. We need to teach others that talking about suicide will never cause someone to attempt it. Fact is, if we are talking about it they have already thought about it. Hiawatha, Kansas has a senior class who is about to graduate and walk into a big world without the skills to move on from a loss they have not been allowed to talk about at school due to our teachers not being educated themselves.

We teach our youth about drugs and alcohol, effects they have on the body and brain. We teach them that they will not have a successful life if they are on drugs and alcohol, how they will lose friends and family due to addiction. We preach this to our youth but yet we don't educate them on what to do when life seems overwhelming and they feel hopeless. I think it's time we mandate our educators to be aware and effectively guide our youth. By having our teachers more educated we will save lives. The "silent epidemic" has become just that, let's not speak about it and no one will ask questions. We

NEED to speak about it and we NEED to educate. I am standing here today as a mother, asking the Kansas Legislation to pass the Jason Flatt Act and allow our teachers to become more educated on how to recognize a youth in need and a new beginning to educating our youth.

I stand here today as a member of a group of grieving family and community members who have had our world turn upside down. Knowing it is a time for a change, knowing by sharing our stories and our journeys we can spare other our pain. I'd like to leave you with Kyler's favorite quote I BELIEVE

I Believe

Life is more than survival

I Believe

The heart is more than a muscle

I Believe

We can know right from wrong

I Believe

In hope and freedom

I believe my life can make a difference

I believe

In the message of the cross

So what do you?

Believe