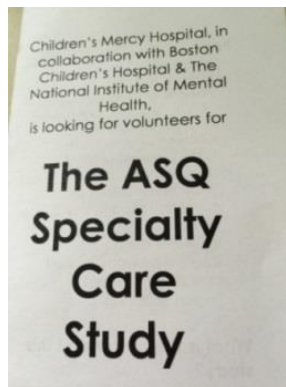


Proponent Testimony for Amy Hutchens

To: Committee of Education

Chair: Senator Steve Abrams

Regarding: **SUPPORT FOR JASON FLATTS ACT/SB 323**
The "Silent Epidemic"/Suicide Prevention/Awareness



****Children's Mercy Kansas City implements suicide screenings after losing patients to suicide in November 2014**** In January 2015, the Teen Clinic screens all patients during well child exams and mental health concerns, and in November 2015, the pediatric care clinics screen all patients over the age of 12 utilizing the PHQ-2 (Patient Health Questionnaire-2) . This questionnaire inquires about the frequency of depressed mood over the past two weeks and screens for depression in a "first step" approach. They are currently working to incorporate the questionnaire in-patient to focus on the population of patients ages 12 and older. In March 2015, the C-SSRS (Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale) was implemented in the Teen Clinic and South location as a suicide screening administered for patients ages 12 and older. The screening assesses suicidal ideation and behavior with specific plan and intent and provides staff with a better indication of a need for help. In August 2015, The ASQ (Ask Suicide-Screening Questions) Specialty Care Study was implemented as a research study about adolescent mental health for adolescents between the ages of 10-21. The purpose of this study is to develop a brief screening instrument to assess the risk for suicide in pediatric patients.

There are more than **5000 suicide deaths per year. One out of three suicide deaths is not an individual's first attempt.** In high school, **one in 12 students will attempt suicide per year. Only 33% are seen by a healthcare professional for suicide attempt.**

The Jason Flatts Act training helps educators identify the warning signs of children 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 they see our child needs help. I strongly believe the teachers 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 Hospital can implement a number of suicide screenings shortly after losing patients to suicide in November 2014, the educators in our schools are perfect resources who are seeing **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.

My daughter, Alyssa Lane Hutchens, was a healthy, active 13 year old girl in February 2011 involved in volleyball, basketball and softball. Little did we know things were about to change. She was taken to our local doctor's office and diagnosed with Influenza. Two days later her symptoms worsened and she was transported via helicopter to Children's Mercy Hospital where she had to be resuscitated en route. Once my husband and I arrived at the hospital we were greeted by the hospital Chaplain and advised Alyssa was only given about five hours to live and we needed to call our family. Her diagnosis: H1N1 Swine flu, pneumonia, heavy strep, sepsis, kidney and liver failure. She was placed in a medically induced coma and on dialysis. Alyssa was a fighter and made it past those five hours. She remained on a ventilator for 23 days and hospitalized for 43 days. While hospitalized, Alyssa needed physical and occupational therapy to teach her to walk, write and swallow. As a parent, it was very difficult to see your child struggle to regain her normal life's routines. Alyssa remained in physical therapy over the

next two years to regain her lost muscle and skeletal function and skills and had to give up her love of playing sports. She had multiple surgeries due to torn ligaments and tendons due to all the medications and experimental drugs to save her life. Her pulmonary function remained weakened and her immune system compromised. Since contracting H1N1, Alyssa was frequently sick and highly susceptible to infection, requiring many doctor visits and hospital stays. She was later diagnosed with fibromyalgia.

This near-death experience was very hard for our family to recover from. How do you tell your child they are never going to dribble a basketball again??

In August 2014, Alyssa was getting ready on the fourth day of her junior year of high school. While taking her daily dose of medication with a glass of water, she vomited. However, she did not feel ill. She proceeded to go to school and eat school lunch and vomited again. After a call to the hospital, I was instructed to bring her to the ER. Alyssa was admitted to the hospital under the care of gastrointestinal doctors and a scope was done with negative results. A feeding tube was inserted but she also vomited it. Alyssa proceeded to vomit 21 feeding tubes during her 3 week hospital stay. The feeding tube was then inserted by-passing her stomach and into her intestines. The hospital advised us they were referring us to the GI specialists at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. They are a wonderful Children's Hospital who they felt could better serve us. Alyssa was discharged from the hospital the beginning of Sept with a feeding tube, she returned to school, and the soonest we could get into Nationwide Children's Hospital was November 17. While speaking with doctors and reviewing medical records, it appeared Alyssa's stomach had stopped working from her initial illness, H1N1, and was shutting down. The doctors were looking in to putting in a permanent feeding tube in her stomach. She would never eat or drink by mouth again. Alyssa took her life on the morning of November 10, 2014, at the age of 16, with a self-inflicted gunshot wound in our home where I discovered her body. She never made it to Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. Alyssa's suicide came three days after Ciara Webb and approximately 12 hours after Cady Housh, also 16 year old juniors with chronic medical problems and patients of Children's Mercy Hospital. All three girls rested together at the Frontier Forensic Morgue while their entire communities remained in shock of their death by suicide.

As parents and educators we need to be able to talk openly to our youth. They think suicide is their only option. 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. **Suicide is preventable.**

As a surviving mother over the last year it is the hardest pain I have endured. I did not sleep for the first five months and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Do you know what that is like?? I work in a prison and I felt like a prisoner myself and was treated like one. My husband visited me just like families visit inmates on visiting day; strip searched and watched to take a shower. My family abandoned me because I was "crazy." But yet I was the one who lost my child to suicide and found her. As I would start to drift off to sleep I would have nightmares of digging up her grave trying to get to her. I was diagnosed with PTSD and was nearly forced out of my job to medically retire. Every day these questions run through my head--Did Alyssa lie in bed every night, cry herself to sleep in pain and then have to get up go to school and act like nothing was wrong? Did she go to school every day sad and feel like she couldn't talk to anyone? If someone at school would have asked would she have opened up? They see her 5 days a week all day long. Speaking from experience at our school now, the students are not to bring up the word suicide after my daughter's death or even talk about Alyssa. I have been blocked from the school's email system and school administration will not speak or even look at me. What did I do? I have tried reaching out to the school administration to offer any sort of assistance so this doesn't happen to someone else. I DO NOT WANT ANY PARENT TO GO THROUGH WHAT I HAVE GONE THROUGH AND THAT IS WHY I AM HERE TODAY!! **If educators can save lives, parents will no longer have to bury their children. Please vote to support SB-323!!**