

January 25, 2016
Senator Greg Smith
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Senator Smith:

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Barbara Mares Nelson, I am the Chapter Chairperson of the Greater Kansas Chapter for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention based out of Lenexa, Kansas. As a chapter, we cover the entire state of Kansas and 11 counties in Missouri. We have Board members and volunteers in both states, all of which are very supportive of the Jason Flatt Act that you are working on in the Kansas Senate at this time.

The Greater Kansas Chapter has implemented an educational program in various schools in the Olathe and Shawnee Mission areas locally, as well as different areas of both states. We believe Education is the key to suicide prevention and awareness. As a Chapter, we hold a fundraising "Walk" each fall to raise the funds that pay for these programs, in order to provide them to the schools at no cost. We train the teachers and counselors on how to present Suicide Education and Prevention to the students. In addition, we go to the schools and present assemblies while sharing our stories with the students.

Protecting children should be of utmost importance to every school. Physical protection for our children isn't enough. Mental health protection of our children is crucial in our technologically advancing world. Our children can be easily targeted and harmed through the use of technological devices. This type of torment, coupled with face-to-face challenges of school life, can lead a child down a road of desperation. It is vital that all administration, teachers, and support staff are properly trained to know the warning signs of suicide in youths of all ages. Education of warning signs and measures to help a child in trouble are key to create a true safe place for a child to thrive. It is time to acknowledge that our society is in a mental health crisis that includes children. Confronting the issue with a tool kit for educators will vastly reduce the number of children lost to suicide. Please don't let the stigma surrounding suicide prevent the implementation of a program that can save lives. Empower our educators with the gift of saving a life.

I lost two sons (Jason Mares, 16 years old & Justin Mares, 18 years old) to suicide within 7 months of each other. Perhaps if my sons' school had been properly trained, my two boys would still be here today. Our board members have either lost a loved one to suicide or have struggled themselves. They know what it is like and know the importance of educating and advocating for programs to be available to our students. This is a journey that no one should ever have to walk. I am very much aware of the loss of your daughter and my heart goes out to you. You know the pain of losing a child. We must educate our youth today that suicide is not the answer.

I could tell you all the statistics on how many lives are lost each year to suicide however, one life lost is one too many.

This is not something that an individual works on alone. It takes many people to support this act. The Greater Kansas Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has your full

support in the Jason Flatt Act bill. We will do everything we can to help implement educational programs in all the schools throughout Kansas. We have the means to do it and want to be involved.

Sincerely,
Barb Mares Nelson
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If you are in crisis, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)