



Testimony to Senate Committee on Education on Senate Bill 323

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Mister Chair and members of the Committee, my name is Colin Thomasset, I am the Associate Director for the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc. The Association appreciates the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of Senate Bill 323, which would create the Jason Flatt Act requiring suicide prevention training for school district personnel.

The Association represents the 26 licensed Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in Kansas that provide behavioral health services in all 105 counties, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. In Kansas, CMHCs are the local Mental Health Authorities coordinating the delivery of publicly funded community-based mental health services. As part of licensing regulations, CMHCs are required to provide services to all Kansans needing them, regardless of their ability to pay. This makes the community mental health system the “safety net” for Kansans with mental health needs, collectively serving over 127,000 Kansans.

Suicide is a very serious, complex, and emotional issue and is currently the tenth leading cause of death in the United States overall, but the second leading cause of deaths among youths between the ages of 15 – 24. To put this in perspective, in 2010 more people died of suicide (38,364) than motor vehicle crashes (33,687) and there are also reasons to believe that the statistics on suicide are vastly underreported.

So what can we as society do to help with this situation? A big part of preventing suicide revolves around identifying those at risk of suicide. A few hours of training can help school personnel identify risk factors and make them better able to respond to students exhibiting warning signs.

The Association appreciates this committee’s willingness to take a look at this very important issue, and we would urge you to support Senate Bill 323. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.