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Chairman Sen. Steve Abrams
Education Committee, Kansas Senate
Room 144-S, Kansas State Capitol
Topeka, Kansas 66612

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Greetings Sen. Abrams and members of the Senate Education Committee,

As someone with a very long history of working in suicide prevention and bereavement in Kansas, I am very excited about the possibility of legislation requiring training in suicide awareness and prevention for staff of Kansas schools. At the same time, I am saddened by the knowledge that this is prompted by the death of Cady Housh, and so many other young Kansans.

I urge you to work toward passing a Jason Flatt Act for Kansas during the 2016 Kansas Legislative Session. I will continue to help in all the ways that I am able. This will be the first legislation in Kansas for suicide prevention. And hopefully it will be followed in subsequent years with additional legislation for suicide prevention.

As we know, suicide risk is not limited to school-aged youth. In 2014, 454 Kansans died by suicide, including 26 who were 19 or younger at the time of death. Researchers estimate that the number of attempts by young people is 100 to 200 times the number of deaths.

In 2014, nearly 43,000 Americans died by suicide. Recent research from the University of Kentucky Military Bereavement Study tells us that at least 115 people are closely affected by each of these people's deaths. Suicide losses are devastating to our communities. Suicide is a major public health issue that deserves increased attention and resources.

I believe that the Kansas Legislature passing Senate Bill 323 during this session is an essential step toward saving lives in Kansas. I hope you agree.

A bit about my background: I have lived in Lawrence, Kansas since moving here to attend the university. Soon after I began, first as a volunteer, then as Director of Headquarters, Inc., my work in suicide prevention and bereavement. I continue this work privately (with a sliding-to-\$0 fee scale when needed.) I have been active locally through nationally, including projects with the (Kansas) Governor's Mental Health/Behavioral Health Services Planning Council, American Association of Suicidology, and the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. I've also lost loved ones to suicide. Suicide prevention is a very personal commitment for me, as well as part of what defines me as a social work professional.

Sincerely,
Marcia Epstein, LMSW
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