



Testimony to the Kansas Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee on HB 2260

3/23/2023

Madame Chair and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on HB 2260. My name is Will Warnes and I am a child and adolescent psychiatrist serving as the medical director for the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas since February 2022. I also serve as the medical director for The Guidance Center, the community mental health center (CMHC) for Leavenworth, Atchison, and Jefferson counties in northeastern Kansas since July 2011. In addition, I am a former rural family practitioner, having practiced in rural Nebraska prior to my psychiatry training and my arrival in Kansas. It is on behalf of the Association that I am here today to testify in favor of House Bill 2260.

I arrived in Kansas in 2011, immediately after completing my psychiatry training at the University of Iowa. I had a desire to continue working with underserved and rural populations as I had in Nebraska. However, through my job search in Kansas, I found that the highest-paying positions would only accept a limited number of private insurances. Many did not accept insurance at all. Additionally, the majority were in the suburban areas in Kansas City and Wichita as opposed to the rural areas in which I wanted to practice.

However, helping me make my decision to join The Guidance Center was the fact that it is a participating National Health Service Corps (NHSC) site. After starting practice, I was accepted into the National Health Service Corps loan repayment program. This program paid a portion of my student loans for each year of full-time work I completed working in an underserved area. Having this extra support allowed me to select a slightly less lucrative position, but one in which I could treat a severely underserved population. Over the next five years not only did I successfully complete the NHSC program, I had my student loans paid off, I was promoted to medical director, I developed a love of treating patients experiencing mental health symptoms in our three county catchment area, I bonded with my co-workers at our center, I felt I was an integral part of the CMHC “safety net” system in Kansas, I adopted the CMHC holistic approach to care (medication services, psychotherapy, and rehabilitation services), and despite completing the program I had no plans of leaving The Guidance Center, where I continue practicing today 11 years later.

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Since 2015, I have had a physician assistant and a nurse practitioner participate in the Kansas State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP). Over my career in Kansas, I have seen many therapists and prescribers alike select and keep positions in rural areas due to a variety of loan repayment programs. While some move on after completing their obligations, many stay after bonding to their facility and their community. To the extent that it attempts to expand the mental health work force in Kansas, I support House Bill 2260.

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