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KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 SW 10TH AVENUE / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

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**Written Only Testimony – Proponent**

**House Committee on Health & Human Services**

**House Bill 2236**

**March 4, 2025**

Chairperson Carpenter, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of HB 2236.

KNEA has been a vocal advocate for the health, safety, and well-being of students. We strongly believe that a healthy school environment positively impacts children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development.

Our members have debated and adopted several resolutions focused on the health, safety, and welfare of students. Many of these resolutions address mental health, including the integration of comprehensive school counseling programs provided by licensed school counselors. They also emphasize the importance of school social work services delivered by trained professionals specializing in crisis intervention, individual and group therapy, and behavior management. Additionally, our resolutions support special diagnostic services for the early detection of mental health issues. We also strongly advocate for access to school and community health facilities to meet the needs of students, their families, and the broader community.

The nation's youth are facing an unprecedented mental health crisis. In a June 2023 press release, Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City reported that more than 15 million children need mental health services, yet only 30–50 percent receive care. This aligns with what educators are witnessing in the classroom. Our members routinely report an increase in student behavioral challenges, and it would be shortsighted to ignore the role mental health plays in these incidents.

Our schools need as many resources as possible to address the mental health challenges affecting our children. HB 2236 will strengthen the mental health intervention team program by codifying it in state law. This should also help ensure consistent funding as the program expands. KNEA believes that enhancing this program will be instrumental in providing students with the critical mental health services they deserve.

Thank you for your time.