

To: Kansas House Education Committee

RE: Testimony in favor of Substitute SB 323, A Jason Flatt Act For Kansas

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On November 9, 2014 Cady Housh died by suicide. Cady was a student at Olathe Northwest High School and loved by many. Her mom, Cathy Housh, urges Missouri and Kansas legislators to pass the Jason Flatt Act.

Position:

In 2016, the Kansas Legislature should pass the Jason Flatt Act, Substitute SB 323, which in its current version requires suicide prevention training and policies and procedures for staff of accredited schools in Kansas.

The Problem:

In 2014, 454 Kansans died by suicide. Five of those Kansans were between 5 and 14 years old. Twenty-one others were between 15 and 19 years old. For each of those young people who died, at least 115 family members, friends, members of their school communities, and others were affected. (Estimate from the University of Kentucky Military Suicide Bereavement Study.)

In addition to those who died, many other young Kansans are affected by suicide risk. The most recent Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) during 2013 reports that for Kansas 9th – 12th grade youth, during the 12 months before completing that YRBSS:

- 8.4% had made at least one suicide attempt,
- 12.5% had made a suicide plan,
- 16.4% had seriously considered suicide, and
- 24% had felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities.

Why this matters:

Losing young Kansans to suicide is devastating for families and communities. It's time for Kansas to do more to save lives from suicide. School staff with training on suicide awareness and prevention could become part of the help for Kansas youth, by providing support, alerting parents or guardians, and directing them to other sources of mental health care when needed.

The bottom line:

Even without any financial commitment from the Legislature, through the Jason Flatt Act, Kansas would create a trained school workforce that could save young lives of young Kansans.

More about Suicide Prevention Education for Personnel of Schools

From the Jason Foundation, national advocates for the Jason Flatt Act, "Does training our educators / teachers to be better able to recognize possible suicidal ideation or be better able to respond to a student who expresses thoughts of suicide make a difference?... Simply said, taking information such as what are the warning signs, elevated risk factors, do's and don'ts in helping someone who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide and all importantly what resources are available to refer for professional help – to take this information and successfully convey this to your target group is SUCCESS in suicide prevention."

History of the Jason Flatt Act:

From the Society For Prevention of Teen Suicide, "The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide was founded in 2005 by Scott Fritz and Don Quigley, two friends who lost teenaged children to suicide.... The board made it their mission to have legislation passed in New Jersey requiring all educators to complete at least two hours of instruction in suicide prevention as part of their professional development requirement. The successful passage of this legislation in 2007 made New Jersey the first state in the country to require such training."

From the Jason Foundation, "In 2007, The Jason Flatt Act was first passed in Tennessee and became the nation's most inclusive and mandatory youth suicide awareness and prevention legislation pertaining to Teacher's In-Service Training. It required all educators in the state to complete 2 hours of youth suicide awareness and prevention training each year in order to be able to be licensed to teach in Tennessee.... In all, 16 states have now passed The Jason Flatt Act."

Link to Kansas Substitute SB Bill 323, the Jason Flatt Act:

http://kslegislature.org/li/b2015_16/measures/sb323/

Data Sources:

"6 Questions With Julie Cerel" video, www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzSAPBswDXw

Julie Cerel, licensed psychologist and Associate Professor at the University of Kentucky College of Social Work is Principal Investigator on the 2012-2014 University of Kentucky Military Suicide Bereavement Study, funded by the Military Suicide Research Consortium of the U.S. Department of Defense

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) 2013 pp 72-78 suicide-related data (most recent results)

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6304.pdf>

The Jason Foundation, The History of The Jason Flatt Act: A Legislative Action for the Training of Educators in Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention

<http://kansasmentalhealthcoalition.onefireplace.com/resources/Documents/Jason%20Flatt%20Act%20History.pdf>

KDHE Injury Prevention and Disability Program: Suicide In Kansas, March 2012

http://www.kdheks.gov/idp/download/Suicide_Report.pdf

Kansas Annual Summary of Vital Statistics, 2014

http://www.kdheks.gov/hci/as/2014/2014_AS.pdf

Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide, About Us

<http://www.sptsusa.org/about-us/>

USA Suicide: 2014 Official Final Data

<http://www.suicidology.org/Portals/14/docs/Resources/FactSheets/2014/2014datapgsv1b.pdf>

Free 24/7 Suicide Prevention Counseling

- Crisis Text Line: text "Start" to 741-741, www.CrisisTextLine.org/get-help-now/
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800.273.8255 (Option 1 for Veterans Crisis Line), www.SuicidePreventionLifeline.org

National suicide prevention resources

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. www.AFSP.org
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center, www.SPRC.org
- Zero Suicide, <http://ZeroSuicide.SPRC.org/>