

To: Committee of Education

Chair: Sen. Steve Abrams

Regarding: **SUPPORT FOR- Jason Flatts Act / SB 323**

The “Silent Epidemic”/ Suicide Prevention / Awareness

Testimony on behalf of Cathy Housh, Parent, Oral Proponent

**November 10th, 2014, Kansas made international news for a very, very horrific reason:
TEEN SUICIDES-**



Over-all, suicide is **the 2nd leading cause of death for our youth ages 10-24**. Kansas is higher than the national average in suicide rates. Since 1980, in ages 10-14, there has been an alarming **128% increase in suicides nationally**. **More teenagers** and young adults will die by suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, and chronic lung disease, **-COMBINED**

Four out of Five teens who attempt suicide have **given clear warning signs**. The Jason Foundation, Inc. is an educational organization that's sole purpose is to educate awareness and prevent suicides. The Jason Flatts Act is our nation's most inclusive and mandatory youth suicide awareness and prevention legislation pertaining to Teachers In-Service Training. It requires educators to complete **2 hours of youth suicide prevention and awareness training annually**. The training is done through on-line certification and at **ZERO cost** for the training.

When Tennessee passed this Act in 2007, (the first state to pass the act), they saw a **28.3% reduction in suicides each year for the next 3 consecutive years. Coincidence?** It's a coincidence I would love for Kansas. There are 16 states that have passed The Jason Flatts Act and approximately 4-5 more that are looking to pass legislation this year. **Currently, Kansas is one of the few** states that have **nothing legislatively in place to mandate suicide awareness**.

Our Kansas Attorney General, Derek Schmidt, is an active Ambassador of the Jason Foundation, Inc., as is the Missouri AG and several other state AGs. In May 2013, his office looked at adopting the Jason Flatts Act. *Members of his staff recommended* that the Jason Flatts Act be mandated in our state of Kansas. Unfortunately, that did not happen at that time. We know that our teachers and staff members are in a unique position of seeing our children, 5 days per week. They already have a mandatory reporting for emotional disturbance. Receiving mandatory awareness training will help them to, without a doubt, *identify these high risk kids* and **refer** them to get the help they need-**They will save lives**. The AGs office has recently submitted a **Senate Concurrent Resolution** for implementing, "The Jason Flatts Act". The **Kansas State Child Death** Review Board has confirmed that suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for children ages 10-17 in our State.

How many of you have experienced a suicide in your family or circle of friends? "The Silent Epidemic-Suicide." As in the 60s Cancer, teen pregnancy, if we don't talk about it, it will go away. Guess what, that's NOT HAPPENING. Statistically, it is still growing. Amazing how many have felt this horrific pain and will do so, until we stand up and stop this. We need JFA to be adopted as submitted along with our AGs resolution. No fiscal note is attached. Just the **lives of our children are at jeopardy**. These are the very sad and horrific facts.

Let me tell you a little bit about my daughter, Cady Housh. My daughter died on November 9th, by suicide. Cady was a vibrant 16 yr. old and a junior at ONW. She loved soccer, her family and friends. Her dogs had a special place in her heart. She had over 150 volunteer hours. I could tell you hours of humorous stories about my child. Her life at 15 began to change.

She battled serious GI issues for several years. She had been at Children's Mercy GI/Abdominal Pain Clinic off and on for the last couple of years, including in-patient. As she got older, her depression became very obvious and serious.

Her father and I were separated. He has OCD and other mental illness-Undiagnosed. He refuses to think anything is wrong with him or with Cady-The Stigma of mental health was a big factor in his decision not to seek help for himself or agree to help CadyHer Junior year; she spent more time with her father than with me. This was a major change as we did everything together -Trips, several-out of state soccer tournaments, etc...

Cady started withdrawing from me, her soccer friends, and other friends that had been a good influence on her. She missed **65 classes at ONW** (Excused by her father calling in) for the months of September and October. Yet, she was not attending any doctors. The school and school SRO officer called me as they were concerned with her heavy absenteeism and had been unable to reach her father. I spoke with both of them and said we were in a family crisis-Help us. They suggested I contact DCF and make a report, that they could see my concern and felt it a good idea to do so. I did just that. *Twenty-four hours later, it was ruled out* with no investigation.

In a period of 13-15 months, Cady had 2 arrests. The last was for shopping lifting.-Another sign of suicide I wasn't aware of. She had a moving ticket violation once the school pulled cameras and found Cady *driving recklessly out of the school* parking lot causing an accident which she drove off from. Cady and her father kept these details from me until I was notified from the court system. At the time of her passing, Cady had heavy absenteeism, 4-Fs, registered with the school SRO because of her diversion and then later the shoplifting. Later I found out that *she had been telling her peers* that she was suicidal. After her death, neighbors cleaning her dad's home, found a number of empty liquor bottles in her room and in the entertainment room. There is heavy, graphic and disturbing graffiti on the walls in her bedroom-Including *Suicide ideation*.

Her peers were concerned about her pulling away from them and from me. Some of their parents spoke to me after the fact that they were going to report her situation to DCF, but did not. Other parents did speak to her about their concern for her and her vast change in personality-to no avail. If the kids understood and had been educated to not keep her secret, if the school would have reported her truancy problems, if the school would have contacted me or Marillac, (which I had never heard of before), -there are a million "ifs" for me and others in contact with Cady. The point being, we all let her down. She was a kid displaying heavy signs of high risk suicide and no one seemed to be aware until she stepped in front of that train, Sunday, November 9th, 2014 at 8pm just 2 days after Ciara Webb, same school, and same grade took her life and 13 hours before 16 year old Alyssa Hutchens from Leavenworth took her life. All three 16 year olds -juniors at their school, and all three with chronic medical problems, lay side by side in the forensic morgue while their family, friends and community mourned their death. We beg you to help us **STOP** this from happening to any other family including the possibility of one of your family members. Let's together pass JFA and the AGs resolution. You know it will save lives-***It is the right thing to do. Cathy Housh-Cady's MOM***