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Timothy Keck, Secretary

Sam Brownback, Governor

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Mr. Chariman and members of the House Health and Human Services Committee:

Four years ago, then KDADS Secretary Shawn Sullivan testified that Kansas face a persistent and growing shortage of psychiatrists.

Not only in the state hospitals, but in the state as a whole, there were not enough psychiatrists to meet the demand. Of the 105 Kansas Counties, all but five urban ones are federally designated as mental health professional shortage areas and experts say the problem has worsened over the past several years.

Four years ago the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas made dealing with the problem one of its top legislative agenda items for 2014 and described the shortage as “alarming” in its policy statement. The association proposed that the state double the number of residencies at KU.

Kansas lost a significant number of psychiatrists over the last 15 years due to a reduction in training programs and retirements.

Today, nothing much has changed. Osawatomie State Hospital has a 33 percent vacancy rate for psychiatrists; Larned State hospital has a 58 percent vacancy rate. Hiring contract psychiatrists through an agency to provide adequate care for our patients is a very expensive proposition and puts increasingly unsustainable pressure on our hospital budgets.

I believe the only way to enhance treatment for persons with mental health issues and adequately staff our hospitals would be to greatly increase the number of residents at KU.

We need to begin the process of replenishing this shortage. So I wholeheartedly endorse Senate Bill 32 that will increase the number of psychiatric residency at KU Medical School. This will serve our state well, and strengthen our state psychiatric hospitals.

Tim Keck, Secretary