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Timothy Keck, Secretary

Sam Brownback, Governor

Madam Chairman and members of the Senate Education Committee:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of SB 100.

The psychiatric hospitals operated by the State of Kansas have faced a persistent and growing shortage of mental health nurses for several years now.

Not only at the state hospitals, but in the state as a whole, there are not enough trained mental health nurses to meet the ever-increasing demand.

This is an ongoing problem for Larned State Hospital, and to a lesser extent, Osawatomie State Hospital. We need well trained, full-time nurses to provide the quality of care we strive to deliver to our patients.

Larned State Hospital's location, in a sparsely populated rural area, makes it especially difficult to fill vacancies with qualified staff.

At Larned State Hospital the vacancy rate for mental health nurses was as high as 40 percent two years ago. This has forced the hospital administration to rely on more expensive agency (contract) nurses to fill the gaps.

Increasing the number of nursing students with sponsors in rural areas could help us recruit more nurses who want to build their careers with the state, lower our vacancy rate and relieve the pressure that vacancies put on current members of the staff.

So I wholeheartedly endorse Senate Bill 100 because I believe it will increase the number of mental health nurses in rural areas.

This will serve our state well, and strengthen our state psychiatric hospitals.

Tim Keck, Secretary