

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Education

Senate Bill 333 “Jason Flatt Act”

Madam Chairwoman and members of the Committee, my name is Tim DeWeese, I am the Director of the Johnson County Mental Health Center. I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony on my concerns regarding the proposed amendments to Senate Bill 333, which decrease the effectiveness and intent of the original bill.

According to the 2016 Kansas Annual Summary of Vital Statistics, nearly 1 Kansan dies everyday due to suicide. This means you, as Legislators, lose one constituent everyday due to suicide. Suicide remains the second leading cause of death for the 15-24 age group and more frightening is that suicide has risen to the third leading cause of death for the 5-14 age group.

The State of Kansas is well above the national average for suicide. Unfortunately, our community has the highest rate of suicide in the state and can easily be described as a growing epidemic. We have recently experienced a series of tragic events in Johnson County, resulting in many people asking “what can we do?”. The issue of suicide is not just a school issue, nor is it just a mental health issue. It’s a community issue and therefore it demands community-wide response.

Educating our communities through Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST), as well as promoting resilience and coping among our youth is critical if this trend is going to be altered. Suicide Prevention Training is not unlike first aid training, with the purpose of training all individuals in the skills necessary to recognize and provide first aid care for injuries, sudden illness and in serious cases, it may be necessary to keep the person alive.

In my opinion, the original Jason Flatt Act passed requiring **all** school staff to complete a **one-hour**, self-directed training session was not stringent enough. We must create an environment which promotes an open and honest discussion about suicide. Additionally, interactive training is required to prepare teachers, parents and friends to overcome the awkward silence and ask the difficult question; “Are you thinking about suicide or about killing yourself?”.

Unfortunately, the proposed amendments to Senate Bill 333 eliminates the **all** school staff requirement and the **one-hour** minimum. Please consider retaining those requirements at a minimum.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you and I appreciate your consideration of my comments.