

KANSAS MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

An Organization Dedicated to Improving the Lives of Kansans with Mental Illnesses

Testimony regarding SB 438 for Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

Amy A. Campbell – March 13, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to address your committee today on behalf of the Kansas Mental Health Coalition. The Kansas Mental Health Coalition is a statewide roundtable grassroots organization dedicated to improving the lives of Kansans living with mental illness and behavioral health needs.

SB 438 removes prior authorization requirements for behavioral health medications prescribed within the scope of public mental health system facilities. This legislation would put into statute the ability of specialized prescribers to get important medications to people with mental illness and substance use disorders without interruption. More importantly, it would reduce the increasing need for staff to process prior authorizations rather than serving patients.

In 2015, the Kansas Legislature removed the statute that exempted mental health medications from restrictions in the Medicaid program. The Coalition opposed that legislation. Ultimately, the legislation created a Mental Health Medication Advisory Committee to include mental health clinicians in the process to create prior authorization policies and assure that medications were being prescribed safely and effectively across all three Medicaid managed care contractors.

While much of the work of the committee has been positive, it is unfortunate that the implementation of the MHMAC has not matched the promises made during the Legislative Session of 2015. One example is that the committee has not been allowed to implement policies that would streamline cumbersome prior authorization processes. While there has been some success with standardizing forms, the committee has been told that it does not have the authority to change processes.

From the first few meetings, the group has recommended that regular prescribers of these medications be allowed to bypass the back and forth of forms and phone calls required to gain prior authorization of some of these medications – reserving these reviews for prescribers who do not see these patients regularly. The agency did institute this privilege – sometimes referred to as “gold card status” for psychiatrists, but it was not extended beyond that level. Many times, committee members have pointed out that there are nurse practitioners serving within the public mental health system, many in the frontier regions of the state, who may have more expertise with these medications than the average private psychiatrist – yet, they must repeatedly contact the MCOs for prior authorizations.

The Kansas Mental Health Coalition supports this legislation to allow the prescribing clinicians who serve our public mental health system to spend more time seeing patients, and less time dealing with forms.

Obviously, the KanCare program will still have the authority to review prescribing practices of these providers to detect if there are patterns that appear outside of safe practices and can communicate with them about preferred utilization of these medications. The facilities listed in the bill are ongoing partners of the State Medicaid program.

On another note, the Coalition is also concerned about the MHMAC being bypassed for step therapy policies for behavioral health medications. It also lacks transparency. We hope to work with the new leadership at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to reform these practices.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

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