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Testimony Senate Bill 193

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Chairwoman Brenda Landwehr and the Health and Human Services Committee Members:

On behalf of Children's Mercy's Department of Social Work, I ask for your support of Senate Bill 193, which would make amendments to the Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board for social workers.

Children's Mercy's (CM) Department of Social Work employs more than 130 full-time, part-time, and P.R.N. masters level social workers. Our Integrated Care Solutions employ's an additional 30+ masters level social workers. These professionals are serving patients and families in every area of the health system. The Department of Social Work consists of three primary teams, with diverse professional skill sets to meet patient, family and community needs. This includes Medical Social Workers, Child and Family Mental Health Providers, and Community Program Social Workers. They are committed to being at the forefront of patient service and providing evidence-based treatment. They are well respected for their clinical skill set within the Emergency Department, Outpatient Clinics, Inpatient Units, Schools and Community Settings. The Department of Social Work has implemented and expanded many initiatives to meet Children's Mercy mission of improving the health and wellbeing of children by providing the highest level of clinical and psychosocial care.

Our master level social workers often work at multiple Children's Mercy facilities, in both Kansas and Missouri. As a state line provider, it is a requirement for our social workers to maintain licensure in both Kansas and Missouri. However, it is challenging as an employer to recruit social workers who are dually licensed. Many qualified master level social workers are unwilling incur the time or expense of clinical supervision, and therefore, do not pursue a clinical license in Kansas. Kansas requires completing 4000 hours of post-graduate supervised work experience in a clinical setting and a minimum of 150 hours of supervision. This is significantly greater than the requirements of most other states, including Missouri. Having similar licensure requirements for Kansas and reciprocity between states, would make it easier for social workers to apply and maintain their license in more than one state, as required.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), professional social workers are the largest group of mental health service providers. There are more clinically trained social workers than psychiatrists, psychologists and psychiatric nurses combined. Currently, the State of Kansas is seeing record numbers of children in mental health crisis. Within the last year, CM Emergency Department saw an approximately 40% increase in patients presenting in acute mental health crisis. Our master level social workers are trained to provide diagnostic assessment, care and disposition planning. They are finding that children are presenting to the Emergency Department because they are unable to receive the outpatient mental health treatment they need. This is largely due to lack of qualified clinicians and exceptionally long wait times. It is essential to continue to attract qualified clinicians to the State of Kansas. Doing so will increase access to appropriately trained master level licensed professionals, who provide evidenced based practice.

Chairwoman Landwehr and Health and Human Services Committee Members, I respectfully ask for your support of Senate Bill 193.