

February 6, 2020

Proponent: Testimony House Bill No. 2459
Insurance Committee
Becky Fast, Executive Director

Chairman Vickrey and Members of the Committee –

Thank you for the opportunity to address your Committee today on behalf of the Kansas Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW). NASW-KS is the professional association working on behalf of the profession and practice of social work in Kansas. Social workers are licensed at three levels of practice - baccalaureate (LBSW), the master (LMSW), and the independent specialist clinical social worker (LCSW).

Social workers are the largest provider of mental health services in Kansas. Licensed social workers provide more services than all the other licensed mental health care providers combined in Kansas and across the nation. While many social workers provide services in private practice settings, the majority of services are in community-based agencies, both public and private, such as schools, hospitals, clinics, and prisons.

The passage of social work practice licensure law was a consumer protection effort to ensure that Kansans would receive vital mental health services from qualified mental health professionals. The law ensured that *only* the highest level of social work licensure (LCSWs) can provide, without supervision, psychotherapy, assessment-based treatment planning, and diagnosis (K.S.A 65-6319).

Coverage for Both Inpatient and Outpatient Treatment is Critical to Increase Access

HB 2459 would require health insurers to expand coverage of treatment of mental illness and substance abuse disorder for **inpatient or outpatient care**. Providers of clinical social work services express concerns regarding the increasing inequity in provider reimbursement rates between physical and mental health visits. Mental health visits are typically longer in length than physical care visits, yet payment does not reflect the greater clinician intensity of work.

The Kansas Chapter of Social Workers asks for further clarity in HB 2459 as the only licensed mental health professionals identified as a resource for service provision include a *physician or psychologist* licensed to practice in Kansas. Currently, health benefit plans provide reimbursement and coverage for licensed social workers engaged at the independent clinical practice level (LCSW).

Workforce Shortages and Telehealth Payment Parity

Today Kansas is facing a shortage of trained mental health responders. Families and children in need are facing long waits to get treatment especially in rural Kansas. For teens in crisis who are contemplating suicide receiving timely supports and services can mean the difference between life and death.

One strategy to help address workforce shortages and reach patients in rural and underserved areas is through ensuring remote and virtual services are reimbursed at the same level as in-person care. The attached map demonstrates the severe shortage of licensed social workers who are the number one provider of mental health services in Kansas.

Severe Workforce Shortages in Rural Kansas of Licensed Mental Health Professionals

Licensed Psychologists

- 637 - Statewide
- 20 - Western Kansas

Licensed Specialist Clinical Social Workers

- 83 – Western Kansas
- 1,672 – Eastern Kansas

Mental Health Parity Reduces Barriers to Services and on Systems of Care

Despite two recent federal laws meant to bring parity between mental and physical health-care coverage, gaping holes remain in how behavioral health costs are paid. The Millman Report (millman.com) examined differences in reimbursement rates for psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers compared to surgical and primary care providers.

The study reported that out-of-network use of behavioral health providers is higher than for medical providers, supporting the experience of patients and families who have trouble finding in-network mental health providers. The disparity between physical and mental health coverage has grown substantially according to the Bowman Family Foundation, which commissioned the study.

Social work clinicians in Kansas also report increases in recent years in the number of insurance companies issuing claim denials. Many private practice social workers who have accepted insurance for decades now report no longer accepting insurance and moving to a cash-only basis for visits due which further limits care and supports.

The promise of parity remains elusive for many individuals directly impacted by mental illness and substance use disorders. They are denied care when they need it most and have few resources to advocate on their own behalf.

Thank you to the Chairman and the Members of the Committee for discussion and consideration of House Bill 2459.

Licensed Social Workers in Kansas - LSCSW – LMSW – LBSW – 10/2019

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CHEYENNE	RAWLINS	DECATUR	MORTON	PHILLIPS	SMITH	JEWELL	REPUBLIC	WASHINGTON	MARSHALL	NEMAH	BROWN	ATCHISON	WYANDOTT
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SHERMAN	THOMAS	SHERIDAN	GRAHAM	ROOKS	OSBORNE	MITCHELL	CLOUD	CLAY	POTTAWATOMIE	JACKSON	JEFFERSON	JEFFERSON	LEAVENWORTH
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WALLACE	LOGAN	GOVE	TREGO	ELLIS	RUSSELL	LINCOLN	OTTAWA	DICKINSON	GEARY	SHAWNEE	DOUGLAS	DOUGLAS	JOHNSON
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GREELEY	WICHITA	SCOTT	LANE	RUSH	BARTON	ELLSWORTH	SALINE	MORRIS	LYON	OSAGE	FRANKLIN	MIAMI	MIAMI
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HAMILTON	KEARNY	PINNEY	NESS	PAWNEE	STAFFORD	RICE	MCPHERSON	MARION	CHASE	COFFEY	ANDERSON	LINN	LINN
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MORTON	STEVENS	SEWARD	CLARK	KIOWA	BARBER	KINGMAN	SEDGWICK	WILSON	NEOSHO	WILSON	NEOSHO	CRAWFORD	CRAWFORD
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Licensed Specialist Clinical Social Workers

Licensed Masters Social Workers

Licensed Bachelor Social Workers

Western Kansas LSCSW total = 83
Eastern Kansas LSCSW total = 1,672

Western Kansas LMSW total = 73
Eastern Kansas LMSW total = 3,037

Western Kansas LBSW total = 73
Eastern Kansas LBSW total = 1,341