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Testimony for SB 407

I want to start today with some broad statistics from the National Center for Disease Control and Prevention, where studies show suicide as the second leading cause of death in people 10-34 years of age. It's a young age group and typically they are physically healthy and only unintentional injury surpasses suicide. So, why aren't we working hard to make sure we have resources available to help these Kansans get well, just like any other illness? In my opinion, it's our responsibility just like it's our responsibility to make sure we can do any other physically life-saving procedure.

I know of several suicides in my district in recent years. It's caused me great concern because if it's the second leading cause of death among these young folks, it's our job to address it. Yet the Secretary of the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services, (KDADS) has closed the facility in Hays Kansas providing no acute care beds within the city limits or even nearby.

SB 407 will require acute care beds in both Hays or its surrounding area and acute care beds in Garden City or its surrounding area. We don't think our kids should have to travel ___ hours during that critical time of contemplating life or death --- to get treated in Wichita, Kansas City, Topeka or even Nebraska.

High Plains Mental Health Center has told me that since October 15, 2019, our Hays facility has screened a total of 45 youth for inpatient psychiatric admission. Since they couldn't be treated in my district, eighteen of these kids in desperate need of help, were sent to Wichita, the closest place with an open bed. Thirty-four were screened for Kansas City KVC when they had a bed available and 11 youth from our area went to Kansas City. Now remember, even though traveling across our large state is certainly a burden, these are the numbers on the kids who did receive care. We've not even addressed the cases where the parents have said they can't make the trip to either Wichita or Kansas City – and those children in severe need of intervention and treatment – were left untreated because the parents opted to return home with these kids.

Imagine living in a city where if you had a heart attack, there was no place to go for help. We are asking parents and children with mental illness to live in a town just like that – where lifesaving measures are not in place to treat them. It is vital and our responsibility to have acute care beds available in Western Kansas.