



Testimony to House Health and Human Services Committee on House Bill 2206

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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, my name is Michelle Ponce. I am the Associate Director for the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc. The Association represents the 26 licensed Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in Kansas that provide behavioral health services in all 105 counties, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. In Kansas, CMHCs are the local Mental Health Authorities coordinating the delivery of publicly funded community-based mental health services. As part of licensing regulations, CMHCs are required to provide services to all Kansans needing them, regardless of their ability to pay. This makes the community mental health system the “safety net” for Kansans with behavioral health needs.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2206. HB 2206 would update parts of the Kansas Telemedicine Act.

Telemedicine has been a gamechanger for behavioral health treatment during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) allowed more flexibility in treating patients than ever before. In areas of rural and frontier Kansas, telemedicine had been used in behavioral health with success for nearly two decades. Gaps such as broadband and technology hardware had been a barrier. However, the use of telephone has been a significant addition, and the ability to use telemedicine in urban areas helped provide an additional access venue as well.

Our Association would like the CMS allowances to be retained as long as possible for behavioral health. At the appropriate time, we would ask the Committee to consider an amendment to the HB 2206 with language similar to that as follows:

The Kansas Medical Assistance Program shall continue all processes and procedures, including, but not limited to reimbursement rates, authorizations, codes, required technology, and provider qualifications for telehealth services that are in place on January 1, 2021, until the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services of the United States Department of Health and Human Services rescind, alter, modify, or otherwise change such processes and procedures for providing telehealth services.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee today, and I will stand for questions at the appropriate time.