

My name is Sheila Albers and I am a resident of Overland Park KS.

I am here today to express my utmost support for HB2281 which establishes 988 as the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in KS. In my previous professional life, I was a public educator and most recently a middle school principal in the Blue Valley School District. I left my career in education in 2019 to pursue advocacy work that is near and dear to my heart. See on January 20, 2018 my family's life changed forever. My oldest son John had struggled with the ups and downs related to mental health. He was smart, athletic, a loyal friend, but also impulsive, depressed and at times defiant. On the night of January 20th, we went to have dinner with some extended family at their home. John did not want to go so he stayed behind. Not long after we left, John began posting suicidal comments on social media. His friends, with no other option, called 911. Two officers arrived almost simultaneously. No one knocked on our door nor made any contact with John. One officer ran to get his cell phone to try to get ahold of me or my husband. The other officer stood on my lawn and walked toward the driveway. For whatever reason, John decided he was going to leave. The garage door slowly opened and John backed the van out in a straight line at 2.5 mph. As John backed the van out the officer yelled, "stop stop" and fired two shots into the side passenger window. One of those 2 shots incapacitated or killed John. The minivan spun out of control and the officer shot 11 more rounds. A total of 6 shots hit John and he died at the scene. The officer who killed John had no CIT training and there was not a responder working the evening shift on a Saturday. All of this preventable horror went down in very short amount of time. I suddenly started to get texts that something awful had happened so my husband, and I with other two boys raced home. When we arrived home we could not even get down the street and we never got to be with John.

I could easily be here all day talking about the legal battle for truth, transparency and accountability. However, today is about what we can do to proactively to improve systems to minimize the occurrence of these horrific tragedies. When John went to that emotionally dark place January 20th, 988 would have been a much better option to call. Trained mental health providers could have deescalated John. Trained professionals would have been on scene to assist an officer that had no CIT training. There was no reason to unholster a weapon, let alone fire a gun 13x. NAMI's 988 number as a suicide hotline in KS would be an absolute Godsend for so many families. It will take some of the pressure off our first responders, minimize trauma and most importantly it will SAVE LIVES. Mental health is a national epidemic with tragic consequences, The 988# is one solid step in the right direction to support people who are struggling.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/feds-open-civil-rights-investigation-kansas-teen-killed-police-during-n1241014>