

February 18, 2021

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Re: Testimony and support for HB2281

My name is Kristen Bray and I am a school counselor and Field Advocate for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak about my passionate support for HB2281, in favor of the Lifeline 988. The direct, three-digit line to reach trained National Suicide Prevention Lifeline counselors when one is in the midst of a mental health crisis is crucial in order to prevent deaths by suicide. Establishing this easy to recall number also communicates the importance of mental health, thereby aiding in reducing the stigma with which it is commonly associated.

“In 2020, the Lifeline received over 2.6 million calls, chats, and texts.” In the midst of a crisis, not everyone is in a position to locate the suicide prevention line, or even to do so quickly. According to a Harvard study, “...many appear to have been hastily decided-upon and to involve little or no planning.” The most impulsive individuals tend to be our youth. Thus, we have no time to waste in making this number available to Kansas citizens. “Suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people, and in 2016-2017 alone, there was a 10% increase in suicides of young people between 15-24 years old in the US.”

This issue is important to me because in my 13 year career as an educator, I have lost 7 former students to suicide, and my own child has had multiple serious attempts resulting in lifelong disability. In my experiences, every single adolescent was in acute crisis with no available resource to assist them. An easy to recall number could have helped, saving the lives of our most precious resource, our young people.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before this Committee. My passion is fueled by grief of the preventable deaths of 7 young people, and my hope is that my desperate pleas have been met with compassion and understanding. Please know that the AFSP Greater Kansas Chapter and the wider suicide prevention advocacy community here in our state is always a resource available to you or anyone else in need.

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