

Joy Koesten, PhD

3310 W 137th Street

913-972-7883

Leawood, KS 66224

From: Dr. Joy Koesten
Leawood, Kansas

To: Health and Human Services Committee
Monday, February 22, 2021 - Room 112-N

Topic: Written Testimony in Support of HB2281

Honorable committee members. As a former member of the Kansas House of Representatives, representing House District 28, I thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony to you today in support of HB 2281.

Our oldest daughter, Leah, struggled with anxiety, depression, and addiction for well over a decade. It was only after her second suicide attempt that we finally understood that the core driver of her struggle was rooted in a childhood trauma she had kept secret for over twenty years. It took another three years to get her into a suitable treatment program, in another state, and then another two years for her to get back on stable ground. It shouldn't have been this difficult for her or for her family, but Leah's experience is the primary reason I have been such a strong advocate for mental health and addiction services for so many years.

On July 17th, Leah will celebrate 9 years in recovery. She is happy, healthy and lives a productive life in Nashville working at one of the largest addiction recovery centers in Tennessee. We are grateful for every single day. While Leah's journey has spanned nearly 20 years, she is one of the lucky ones; she survived. Others in our state are not so lucky. Between 1999 and 2016, suicide rates in Kansas rose by 45% (CDC). Suicide is now the second leading cause of death in Kansas for kids between the ages of 15 and 24. In a 2016 community health survey conducted by the Behavioral Health Division of Children's Mercy Hospital, parents in Johnson County identified mental health, specifically depression and suicide, as the top health issue facing adolescents between 12 and 17 years old.

Our family knows firsthand the heartbreak of mental illness and suicide, but we also know that recovery is possible with education and resources. HB2281 would be an enormous first step in making sure that all Kansans would have a lifeline and get the help they need. Not only could it save their life, but it could also afford them the possibility of finding a much quicker path to recovery than Leah did. I urge the committee to pass HB2281 out of committee favorably.

Respectfully submitted

Joy Koesten