



**Health and Human Services Committee
Written Testimony in Support of HB 2281
February 19, 2020**

Chairperson Landwehr and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony today in support of HB 2281. I am the Executive Director of Arcare, Inc. (Arcare), a certified 501(c)(3) organization. Arcare was founded in 1982 and designed to provide caring, planned, professional support for individuals with disability throughout their lives. Initially, the focus was on developing full-service, long-term plans for each of its clients. Over time, the non-profit has added additional programs and core services tailored to meet each person's needs and each family's desires. Arcare serves individuals with all types of disabilities and is certified by the State of Kansas to act as a legal guardian and/or conservator for individuals with disabilities.

As our agency has grown, we are serving an ever-increasing number of individuals with mental health conditions. As a result, we witness firsthand how law enforcement is typically the first response to individuals experiencing a psychiatric crisis. This often results in arresting individuals who really require medical attention rather than incarceration. The lasting impacts of an unnecessary arrest during a mental health crisis, simply because there were no other available resources other than law enforcement has detrimental impacts on the individuals we serve. Many individuals face the loss of their employment as a result, and some individuals in the community have been pushed into homelessness.

The coordinated effort proposed in HB 2281 would provide real solutions to the many problems Kansans who are experiencing a mental health crisis currently face. Call centers operating 24/7 would be able to effectively respond to those in need, coordinate and dispatch crisis teams, connect individuals with programs and follow up after calls. In addition, mobile crisis teams that only include police as co-responders in high-risk situations would reduce law enforcement involvement in mental health crises. This not only alleviates unnecessary use of law enforcement agencies, but also ensures that mental health crises are being handled by professionals specifically trained to handle these types of situations.

In addition, it has been well documented that the pandemic and current economic crisis has led us to another crisis- a mental health crisis- among students, health care providers, families, and other individuals grappling with anxiety and depression. While the need for implementation of 988 as the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in Kansas is not new, it has been exacerbated by the current crises we are facing. HB 2281 would enable Kansas to move forward with addressing the long term mental health impacts being felt by Kansans across the state.



Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 2281. I urge you to support and pass this bill expediently.

Sincerely,

Barb Helm
Executive Director
Arcare, Inc.