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February 19, 2021

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing in support of HB 2281, *Establishing and implementing 988 as the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in Kansas.*

As a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist living and practicing in Kansas I see firsthand the struggles that Kansans face. This expansion is a step in the right direction. We know that nationally rates of suicide have increased in recent years, but in Kansas the situation is dire. We saw a 45% increase in deaths between 1999 and 2016 (CDC, 2018), and many of us are concerned that the numbers coming out of the pandemic will not be any better. A survey by the CDC showed that the rate of suicidal thoughts among adults during the pandemic doubled (Czeisler et al, 2020). The Youth Risk Behavior Survey tells us that 18.8% of high school students in our country seriously considered suicide in the past year, so we know this is an all too common problem (CDC, 2020). Suicide is consistently the second leading cause of death for youth in our community and the rising numbers demand our attention. We know that suicide is a complex problem that requires many interventions to address it fully. A hotline number that is easy to remember will increase the chance that vulnerable individuals might reach out and ask for help in a moment of crisis. Many barriers exist for those who struggle with suicidal thoughts, and by making this number short and easy to remember we send an important message to our community. We send a message that we understand that mental health concerns are real, just as real as any medical emergency, and they deserve our full and immediate attention. Establishing 988 as the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in Kansas is a step towards a community where more Kansans get the help they need.

Shayla Sullivant, MD



Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist