

Sheila Officer

Wichita, KS

Testimony in Support of H.B. 2281

As part of the Wichita, KS community, I am also a community advocate and chair of a grass-root organization that address social and civil rights wrongs. In my community, we have had three KNOWN deaths, one a child who if mental Health Crisis 24/7 were available, and the professionals needed were there, they would NOT have died. Just recently 17 years of age Cedric Lofton died under the care, custody and control of Sedgwick County LEO and Sedgwick County Juvenile Detention Officials. His family called 911 and were ADAMANT in saying he is having a mental crisis. Law enforcement was sent and that aggravated the situation since they are NOT trained professionals to deal with the mentally ill. As a board, we have suggested implementing a 3-digit number that is received and responded to by a mental health crisis professional team. This is needed as well as an increase in service operating 24/7 in all 4 Bureaus of our local City and County department. This needs to change and as taxpayers, we failed this family and this child!

Dialing 988 instead of 911 means we get a specialized number of Mental Health professionals ONLY. Not LEO who are NOT trained and jeopardize the safety of the crisis person.

Look at the Portland, Oregon program: the Behavior Unit Team has been in existence for some time. The program is under the Police Department, and they have an assigned task force to this unit that receives 80 hours of training, plus ongoing. training throughout the year. You don't have to re-invent the wheel. It's already in use.

Please pass H.B. 2281.

It will save lives. Please check out the child recently killed who was crying out for help, and did not get it.

Now we are told, NO BUDGET. Invest in the people, not paper!