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**ORAL PROPONENT testimony for HB 2669 AN ACT Codifying the mental health intervention team program administered by the Kansas department for aging and disability services in state statute.**

To: Madam Chair Senator Molly Baumgardner and Education Committee members

From: Chuck Weber, Kansas Catholic Conference

Date: March 18, 2024

Madam Chair Baumgardner and members of the Senate Education Committee

My name is Chuck Weber and I serve as the Executive Director of the Kansas Catholic Conference, which is the public policy voice of the Catholic Bishops of Kansas. I wish to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to provide PROPONENT testimony for HB 2669.

Once again, you as legislators are being confronted by the grim reality that the collective state of mental health for Kansas—especially children—is in decline.

A recent news report [Childrens Mental Health New Story](#) reveals the disturbing fact that our hospital emergency rooms are being flooded with pediatric cases on a daily basis covering mood disorders, anxiety disorders and behavioral and emotional disorders and more.

A Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study released late last year shows us that ER visits connected to mental health issues have been rising at a rate of 8% a year from 2015 to 2020 — significantly outpacing other types of visits. [CDC Study October 2023](#)

The mental health crisis for our young people reflected in news stories and CDC reports is not going away. If testimony given to this committee and the Special Committee on Mental Health that met over the summer is any indication, this crisis is deepening.

**The good news is that we can do something about it.** When young people have access to mental health services, when they get therapy and other treatments, they can get better and thrive and flourish.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it was determined that the states needed help in navigating the educational challenges of the pandemic. There was a lot of money coming to Kansas from Washington, D.C. Most of these dollars were directed to public schools—with wide latitude in how they could spend it; technology, personnel, supplies to sanitize schools and more, 16 categories in all according to one report [Kansas COVID dollars 2021 Report](#)

Some of these COVID dollars were allocated to non-public schools, called Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools (EANS). There was also flexibility for how these dollars could be spent, and a good number of Catholic schools decided to direct these dollars for categories they could not otherwise afford, **including mental health services.**

Now, post-COVID, these funds are being exhausted, and at the end of the current school year they will be gone. But the children who need mental health services, and the conditions they live with, remain. This is what we are asking you to consider today—care for Kansas children who have been receiving mental health services, and still need them. They will not be there unless you act.

**This legislation is designed to help fill in at least some of the gaps for mental health services for children that are opening due to the cessation of COVID-era federal funding.**

As this conversation unfolds, I would like to ask you to put aside your preconceived notions about families and their children who do not attend a public school. While it is true that many students come from families with plentiful financial resources, I can tell you from personal experience that a great many do not.

In your folders you will find stories from parents, counselors, and educators about those children, your fellow Kansans, who struggle with mental health issues that will go untreated unless help arrives. I really urge you to take time to read these testimonies with an open mind. These are just some of the stories of the children behind the statistics that I mentioned a minute ago. It is our hope that during this hearing that we can provide you with at least a glimpse of what is happening in your communities.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important legislation, and I ask for your continued attention.



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