



MHASCK and MHAH Joint Written Testimony
for
Senate Ways and Means
SB 542

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. Mental Health America of the Heartland and Mental Health America of South Central Kansas are in strong support of the budget for the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services as set forth by the Governor. We are particularly pleased to see a focus on housing and homelessness as both our organizations work heavily in this area and with these individuals.

Mental Health America of the Heartland owns and/or operates 56 units and is building 16 more, and the Mental Health America of South Central Kansas has 92 units, all of which provide support to residents to help them “build a life under their roof” as well as providing the “roof over their head” at no more than 30% of their income. Both organizations employ the “Housing First Model”, so many of our residents come to us straight off the street or out of a shelter.

While both our agencies are focused on permanent housing solutions for persons who have been chronically homeless, due at least in part to their mental health or substance use disorders, we recognize that for some communities and some persons shelters may be an important, and hopefully temporary, first step. We therefore commend KDADS and the Governor for recognizing this and seeking funding for infrastructure as well as designated KDADS staff over housing initiatives.

We further support the proposed addition of an Employment and Benefits Coordinator at KDADS who no doubt would be working with this population to enable them to secure income to meet their basic needs, including housing.

We are pleased at these first steps and hopeful that future budgets and other funding will be pursued to enhance crisis services, often utilized by this population, as well as more permanent housing programs that include the support needed to help individuals remain successfully housed.

Thank you for your attention.

We can be contacted at slewis@mhah.org or 913-244-7585 (cell) or mcjones@mhasck.org or 316-651-1217 with questions or for further information.