

KANSAS MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

An Organization Dedicated to Improving the Lives of Kansans with Mental Illness

The Kansas Mental Health Coalition is comprised primarily of statewide organizations representing consumers of mental health services, families of consumers, community service providers and dedicated individuals as well as community mental health centers, hospitals, nurses, physicians, psychologists and social workers.

We all share a common goal: improving the lives of Kansans with mental illness.

**Testimony presented to the
House Aging and Long Term Care Committee on House Bill 2047
February 9, 2011
By Amy A. Campbell**

The Kansas Mental Health Coalition supports HB 2047 which would expand mental health services targeted to the needs of older Kansans. This measure has been nicknamed the "Bryce Miller Act" in honor of Bryce Miller – a long time state employee and tireless mental health advocate who mastered his own battle with mental illness and continued to be a productive contributing citizen of Topeka. His advocacy work was an example to all of us. Bryce cared deeply about improving the lives of people with mental illness and seniors, in particular. He researched solutions and pursued them with energy and passion. The Geriatric Mental Health Act was his number one priority when he passed away.

Older adults have unique mental health needs. Specialized services are more effective in reaching this growing population than standard centralized mental health services. It is important to reach out to older adults in the community and through primary health care providers and community based in-home visits in order to effectively evaluate an individual's needs and educate them about modern mental health care and its positive effects.

The objectives of HB 2047 build on the successes of the mental health programs currently offered in Kansas for seniors – while offering the opportunity to improve the capacity and quality of those programs and expand such services to other communities.

Research shows that older adults are less likely to access mental health treatment by independently reaching out to their local mental health providers. Offering access to treatment in a non-threatening manner which minimizes social stigma, in coordination with other community based health services, can reap more immediate and effective success. Mental health treatment works – it is just a question of making certain that the right type of services are available to our older adults and that they are encouraged to access the care they need. Empowering older adults with effective treatment for depression, anxiety, and all too often accompanying drug or alcohol abuse can postpone the need for more intensive inpatient or residential care.

This bill requires agency collaboration and provides services in a variety of home settings. These are important elements of providing effective treatment delivery to Kansans who are not likely to reach out to their local mental health center for care. The program is specifically designed to break through some of the common barriers that prevent important care from being delivered to seniors. The effective delivery of mental health treatment can also have powerful benefits for family members and caregivers.

The Kansas Mental Health Coalition supports HB 2047 and the work of the Kansas Mental Health and Aging Coalition in bringing this initiative to the forefront. Please support this legislation this session, along with the necessary funding for implementation.

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HOUSE AGING & LTC

DATE: 2/8/11

ATTACHMENT # 7