

KANSAS MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

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

Testimony presented to the Senate Ways and Means Committee

Amy A. Campbell – March 9, 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to address your committee today on behalf of the Kansas Mental Health Coalition in support of Senate Bill 444.

The Kansas Mental Health Coalition is dedicated to improving the lives of Kansans living with Mental Illnesses and Severe Emotional Disorders. We are consumer and family members and advocates, provider associations, direct services providers, pharmaceutical companies and others who share a common mission. At monthly roundtable meetings, participants develop and track a consensus agenda that provides the basis for legislative advocacy efforts each year. This format enables many groups, that would otherwise be unable to participate in the policy making process, to have a voice in public policy matters that directly affect the lives of their constituencies. The opportunity for dialogue and the development of consensus makes all of us stronger and more effective in achieving our mission.

The goal of mental health treatment is recovery. An important part of recovery is living a self-determined life. Recovery is a process more than a defined point on the spectrum. Independent living, housing and employment are key components.

We appreciate the willingness of the Governor's staff to discuss and endorse amendments to their initial proposal, as written in HB 2442. Programs for persons with disabilities should recognize mental illness as a disability and provide opportunities to all disabled Kansans.

We are especially appreciative of the amendments made to HB 2442 by the House relating to (a) encouraging employment of persons with mental illness (currently defined as SPMI), and (b) the ability to return to Medicaid if necessary. If our policies have negative consequences for those who pursue employment but fail due to a myriad of circumstances, then we are not encouraging them to pursue employment. If I can never access public mental health support again after losing a job, why would I leave public mental health treatment in the first place?

This is particularly important as we look at any programs that are meant to be an off-ramp from public support. We must recognize the complexity and individual nature of the hardships that may arise. By providing methods for people to return to the Medicaid program when necessary, we are encouraging them to take the chance and strive for the greatest level of employment they can achieve. This should be our goal for anyone who is pursuing independence and self-determination.

The Coalition supports policies that facilitate employment in ways that are achievable and provide support for the individual. It is important to recognize that mental illness does not exist as a constant state. There are good days and bad days, good years and bad years. Therefore, flexibility is key to the success of any program.

Finally, national models for employment programs encourage pilot projects and evidence based methods. We hope that the Legislature will endorse SB 444 and revisit the program in the future to review where it has been effective and where we might improve the program. The bill that is before you represents one model of encouraging employment for persons with disabilities. There are many more examples available across this nation. We look forward in working with you to support additional programs in the future.

Thank you for your consideration.

For More Information, Contact:

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Senate Ways and Means

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