



Testimony to House Health and Human Services on House Bill 2254

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Mister Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Kyle Kessler. I am the Executive Director for the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc. The Association represents the 26 licensed Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in Kansas that provide behavioral health services in all 105 counties, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. In Kansas, CMHCs are the local Mental Health Authorities coordinating the delivery of publicly funded community-based mental health services. As part of licensing regulations, CMHCs are required to provide services to all Kansans needing them, regardless of their ability to pay. This makes the community mental health system the “safety net” for Kansans with mental health needs.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 2254. Telehealth and telemedicine are important components of providing quality mental health services to individuals in need and they are a modern part of health care delivery. CMHCs were early adopters of televideo technology and we have a long history of providing services in this manner. In fact, providing mental health services to every county in Kansas means we rely on this technology to meet the needs of our patients and community partners. Workforce challenges also play a role as we face a shortage of qualified mental health and medical professionals across rural Kansas.

Telehealth services can be part of the solution to solving workforce issues, as well as expanding current pools of professionals. The Association is proposing a package of mental health improvement initiatives we are referring to as Mental Health 2020. This aims to restore funding balance to the CMHC System as well as assist in workforce development programs to increase the number of psychiatrists who will be trained and incentivized to stay in Kansas. We have a bill in this committee, House Bill 2124, that would assist our state in recruiting and retaining psychiatrists, of which there is a continual and ever growing shortage. We believe that HB 2254 could be an additional piece to solving our workforce challenges in the Kansas mental health system.

The Association appreciates this committee’s review of this very important issue. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony on HB 2254.