



Testimony to Senate Education Committee on Senate Bill 389

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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, my name is Colin Thomasset. I am the Associate 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 behavioral health needs.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 389. The student data privacy law passed in 2014 as Senate Bill 367 contained provisions that have created a barrier for CMHCs, schools and other organizations that provide critical prevention services for youth in their communities. Through the data the Kansas Communities That Care (KCTC) student survey provides, CMHCs as well as other organizations across the state are able to target their efforts to prevent young people from drinking alcohol and other drugs.

The CMHCs in Kansas recognize the concerns about data and privacy and we feel that Senate Bill 389 is a good solution. The KCTC survey is completely anonymous, voluntary, and the data is confidential. Requiring written consent to participate in the survey has reduced the response rate and in turn the accuracy of the data. The overall state participation rate for this survey prior to the written consent requirement was an impressive 70%. In 2016, the rate was only 37% and some counties did not have enough responses to produce reliable data.

The KCTC student survey was developed based on national research that found that there are specific risk and protective factors in regard to youth and their substance abuse behaviors. Because of the KCTC survey, we are able to prioritize our efforts and address the most relevant issues facing our communities. In addition, the KCTC survey data assists CMHC’s and other organizations apply for federal, state and local grants including the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Department of Justice and Drug Free Communities. Most importantly, as efforts to integrate prevention efforts across multiple areas (substance abuse, mental health, suicide, problem gambling) continues to gain traction, this survey identifies multiple areas that cross over these issues.

Any positive impact we can have in Kansas to prevent youth from abusing alcohol and drugs puts us considerably ahead in the prevention of a host of other issues that significantly impact our state such as: school graduation rates, employment rates, unintended pregnancies, health issues, criminal justice involvement, mental health issues, and avoiding further strain on the alcohol and drug treatment system.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today and I will stand for questions at the appropriate time.