

KANSAS MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

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

Testimony presented to the House Education Committee on
the Jason Flatt Act for Suicide Prevention

Amy A. Campbell – March 9, 2016

Dear Chairman Highland and Members of the Committee:

The Kansas Mental Health Coalition supports the passage of SB 323 – the Jason Flatt Act requiring suicide prevention training for school district personnel.

Please see the attached position paper, which was adopted by the Coalition at our January 27 meeting.

Establishing a plan to empower schools and parents to prevent suicides among young people is a step forward for Kansas. It aligns with the work of the Governor's Mental Health Task Force, which encouraged greater training for school professionals regarding mental health issues.

In addition, we are supportive of the amendments made by the Senate Education Committee. Schools and school personnel should be equipped to recognize warning signs and react appropriately, without incurring unwarranted liability. Sharing information with parents is very important. So many of us are unaware of the simple facts surrounding suicide. We also support the reduced time requirement as amended.

The Senate amendments take into account the concerns of Kansas schools while moving forward to establish the Jason Flatt Act as a part of Kansas statutes, rather than administrative rules. This is important to the families and friends represented at these legislative hearings and those who could not be here.

Thank you for the opportunity to address your committee today on behalf of the Kansas Mental Health Coalition. 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 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.

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KANSAS MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

.....*Speaking with one voice to meet the critical needs of people with mental illness*

Jason Flatt Act: Suicide Prevention Education

Position: The Kansas Legislature should pass the Jason Flatt Act, SB 323, which requires that all teachers and principals licensed or certified by the state board of education annually receive at least two hours of suicide prevention training.

The Problem: In 2014, 454 Kansans died by suicide. Five of those Kansans were between 5 and 14 years old. Twenty-one others were between 15 and 19 years old. For each of those young people who died, at least 115 family members, friends, members of their school communities, and others were affected. (Estimate from the University of Kentucky Military Suicide Bereavement Study.)

In addition to those who died, many other young Kansans are affected by suicide risk. The most recent Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) during 2013 reports that for Kansas 9th – 12th grade youth, during the 12 months before completing that YRBSS:

- 8.4% had made at least one suicide attempt,
- 12.5% had made a suicide plan,
- 16.4% had seriously considered suicide, and
- 24% had felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities.

Suicide prevention education enables school professionals to identify warning signs, recognize elevated risk factors, learn basic do's and don'ts in helping someone who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide and, all importantly, what resources are available to refer for professional help.

Why this matters: Losing young Kansans to suicide is devastating for families and communities. It's time for Kansas to do more to save lives from suicide. School staff with training on suicide awareness and prevention could become part of the help for Kansas youth, by providing support, alerting parents or guardians, and directing them to other sources of mental health care when needed.

The bottom line: Even without any financial commitment from the Legislature, through the Jason Flatt Act, Kansas could create a trained school workforce that could save young lives of young Kansans.

Need more information? Drill deeper into this issue on the back of this page.

More About Suicide Prevention Education for Personnel of Kansas School Districts

From the Jason Foundation, national advocates for the Jason Flatt Act, “Does training our educators / teachers to be better able to recognize possible suicidal ideation or be better able to respond to a student who expresses thoughts of suicide make a difference?... Simply said, taking information such as what are the warning signs, elevated risk factors, do’s and don’ts in helping someone who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide and all importantly what resources are available to refer for professional help – to take this information and successfully convey this to your target group is SUCCESS in suicide prevention.”

History of the Jason Flatt Act:

From the Society For Prevention of Teen Suicide, “The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide was founded in 2005 by Scott Fritz and Don Quigley, two friends who lost teenaged children to suicide.... The board made it their mission to have legislation passed in New Jersey requiring all educators to complete at least two hours of instruction in suicide prevention as part of their professional development requirement. The successful passage of this legislation in 2007 made New Jersey the first state in the country to require such training.”

From the Jason Foundation, “In 2007, The Jason Flatt Act was first passed in Tennessee and became the nation’s most inclusive and mandatory youth suicide awareness and prevention legislation pertaining to Teacher’s In-Service Training. It required all educators in the state to complete 2 hours of youth suicide awareness and prevention training each year in order to be able to be licensed to teach in Tennessee.... In all, 16 states have now passed The Jason Flatt Act.”

Data Sources:

"6 Questions With Julie Cerel" video, www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzSAPBswDXw

Julie Cerel, licensed psychologist and Associate Professor at the University of Kentucky College of Social Work is Principal Investigator on the 2012-2014 University of Kentucky Military Suicide Bereavement Study, funded by the Military Suicide Research Consortium of the U.S. Department of Defense

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) 2013 pp 72-78 suicide-related data (most recent results)

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6304.pdf>

The Jason Foundation, The History of The Jason Flatt Act: A Legislative Action for the Training of Educators in Youth Suicide Awareness and Prevention

<http://kansasmentalhealthcoalition.onefireplace.com/resources/Documents/Jason%20Flatt%20Act%20History.pdf>

KDHE Injury Prevention and Disability Program: Suicide In Kansas, March 2012

http://www.kdheks.gov/idp/download/Suicide_Report.pdf

Kansas Annual Summary of Vital Statistics, 2014

http://www.kdheks.gov/hci/as/2014/2014_AS.pdf

Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide, About Us

<http://www.sptsusa.org/about-us/>

USA Suicide: 2014 Official Final Data

<http://www.suicidology.org/Portals/14/docs/Resources/FactSheets/2014/2014datapgsv1b.pdf>