

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2353

Presented to the House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

February 18, 2024 in person

By Susan Crain Lewis, President/CEO

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Good afternoon Chairman Owens and members of the Committee.

My name is Susan Crain Lewis and I am the President/CEO of Mental Health America of the Heartland, a mental health advocacy organization founded by a psychiatric patient in 1909, as the oldest civil rights organization in the country.

I come before you today in support of House Bill 2353. This is a marked change. When the bill was originally drafted last year, my organization was prepared to testify in strong opposition to the bill, as the language in that version needed to be made more specific, particularly as it related to “serious physical or mental debilitation in the patient”, in order to avoid eroding the civil liberties of the 1 in 4 Kansans who have mental illness.

I want to assert that, both then and now, I am not categorically opposed to involuntary treatment but that it must be a last resort, invoked only when an individual is in imminent danger of significant harm to themselves or others, and that in these cases, full due process must be afforded the individual with alacrity.

I am pleased that over the intervening months, that a small group of dedicated individuals, representing multiple interests and perspectives, spent significant time in dialogue, researching and crafting alternate language, and coming to consensus on language that addressed the concerns of all parties. That language is contained in the revision you have before you today.

Court-ordered outpatient treatment has been found to be a suitable and effective alternative to involuntary commitment in many cases, saving both court and provider time and money, while preserving the rights and dignity of the persons in need of this level of intervention. The bill you have before you provides clarity and appropriate guard rails and due process, while enabling the court system and providers to effectively use this option to serve Kansans in imminent and urgent need of mental health treatment.

I therefore respectfully request that the committee pass this bill so that good legislation that assures people who require involuntary treatment receive it with minimal harm to their civil rights and dignity, can be passed by both chambers this session.

Thank you for your time and attention. I will stand for questions.