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## **COMCARE**

*A Licensed Community Mental Health Center and Certified Addiction Treatment Program*  
271 w. Third St N., Suite 600 Wichita, KS 67202 – [www.sedgwickcounty.org](http://www.sedgwickcounty.org) - TEL: 316-660-7600 - FAX: 316-660-7510

### **Testimony to the House K-12 Education Budget Committee in support of HB 2444**

**March 8, 2023**

**Shantel Westbrook**

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My name is Shantel Westbrook and I have worked with the Mental Health Intervention Teams (MHIT) since 2018. I am the Director of Clinical and Rehab Services for adults and children at COMCARE of Sedgwick County, the largest Community Mental Health Center in Kansas. I am pleased to be writing this on behalf of our partnerships with Wichita Public Schools, Maize School District, and Valley Center School District. Given all of our experience with the MHIT project, we are solid proponents of HB 2444.

COMCARE of Sedgwick County and Wichita Public Schools were included in the first-year pilot in 2018. Since that time, the program has grown consistently each year. Also, noteworthy is that each year the outcome data has been positive and proven to show impressive results. Part of what brings such success is the partnerships between the schools and the already well-established mental health services in our community (COMCARE). The sharing of resources and strengths have built this program to where it reaches more than 800 youth each year. Many of these youth would not be able to obtain mental health services due to barriers such as transportation, cost, and time to get to services. Stigma is also a factor that is directly addressed by making access to mental health services easier. This program's primary goal is to reduce or eliminate any obstacles in the way of a child or youth obtaining the additional support and services included in this partnership.

Maize and Valley Center School Districts have since been included in this program, and each of those districts have expanded the number of schools and youth served over the past three years. The outcomes have been equally positive and continue to create motivation and energy to keep moving forward with enhanced programming and services. Examples of outcomes include reducing negative behaviors, increasing attendance, and increasing academic performance.

Another factor of the success of this program is that the community mental health center provides the full array of services for children and youth in this program. Initial screening and assessment is an essential first step, and then a youth could be in any number of services including therapy, case management, skill building groups, one on one support and monitoring, family therapy, and care coordination to assist youth and families across all of life domains. It has been positive to watch the changes and growth in students in these services over the years. A flexible continuum of services and engagement opportunities allow youth and families the ability to use a lot or a little of the services needed. Each treatment plan is custom designed for that youth family, as well as can be altered at any point seen as necessary and beneficial. Crisis services offered 24/7 by

Same Day Assessment Adult Mental Health Services: 316-660-7540 Adult Addiction Services: 316-660-7550  
Children's Services: 316-660-9605 24-Hour Mental Health Emergency and Suicide Prevention Service: 316-660-7500

both phone and walk-in have been another very positive aspect of this program. Crisis workers can access the very same charts as the regular therapist and case manager, thus making it feel seamless and easier to assess the current crisis. Crisis and safety planning are also part of case management services and can be accessed after hours as needed to offer guidance as to what might help the most. Additionally, through the partnership with Community Mental Health Centers, services continue through the summer and all breaks year-round. This provides stability and opportunity to continue to gain skills and problem solve consistently throughout the year.

I have been a part of community mental health for many years, and this is one of those programs that gives me great job satisfaction. It is such a positive experience to hear the stories of change in these families and youth. An example that easily comes to mind is of a fifth grader that was close to moving to an alternative school, but with the help of the liaison being able to identify this youth as having mental health needs instead of just disruptive behaviors, the youth was immediately put into the Mental Health Intervention Program and was able to be diverted from the alternative school and kept in the more familiar, less restrictive school. The availability of resources and mental health services on site made a difference. It truly is designed to break down barriers, leverage partnerships, and meet the every-changing needs of our youth.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be writing to you in support of HB 2444. Thank you for your consideration.