

Testimony before the

House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice

on

HB 2048

by

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Kansas School Superintendents Association**

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Chairman Jennings:

Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee.

As you begin to read this testimony, please know our organizations support the concept of Erin's Law and have no objection to the curricular content identified in this bill. The concerns our organizations have with the bill are the intended audience and the appropriate implementation of a quality program.

If the legislature deems this curriculum is warranted to sufficiently support and protect the youth of Kansas, it should be taught with fidelity to all students, kindergarten through sixth grade, attending an accredited Kansas school. The reality is sexual abuse to a minor child is not limited to students attending public schools, therefore all Kansas students should participate. Additionally, if a program is expected to be implemented with fidelity, all students should participate in the implementation. Those individual students who are unable to participate because of an opt-out opportunity could potentially be considered at a higher risk of harm by not fully understanding possible dangers and warning signs of sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse, suicide prevention, bullying behavior intervention, substance abuse prevention, drug awareness, crisis intervention, positive behavior supports, and a host of other programs have been required or recommended for schools to implement over the last 25 years. As an educator during those same years and a parent of four active children, I cannot disagree with a single program and see the school as the ideal location for these lessons to occur. After all, schools have the children six to seven hours a day so it is the perfect instructional environment and schools have what often appears as an abundance of time.

Unfortunately, the reality of a school looks a little different. Each of these programs require time, expertise, organization, and implementation, yet none of these valuable programs are identified on a report card, an accreditation report, and most are not listed in a school curriculum guide, but they still happen. Ten years ago many of these programs were taught by an elementary counselor or social worker who went classroom to classroom once or twice a month. During middle school it was a P. E. teacher who had all students at least a semester (each year) if not all year. At the high school level these difficult lessons fell on the shoulders of the health teacher.

As schools have undergone staff reductions and changes during the last eight years, it is the counselors, social workers, and P.E. positions who have seen a change in their role or reduction in their positions. Schools began to increase student outcomes by focusing on the individual student's curricular deficiencies, meaning more time on academic curriculum and less on social curriculum. The bottom line is the teachers', counselors', and the students' day is already full. While I believe both types of curriculum are important to a well-rounded child, the reality is if schools are going to be the only place these lessons can occur, schools are going to need more time and more staff.

As you consider this bill, knowing the importance of this program and the host of similar programs, keep in mind there is another legislative committee in this building trying to balance the state budget and discussing the possibility of reducing the funding for schools. Such a reduction would undoubtedly lead to additional staff reductions, loss of student and staff attendance days, and increase the pressure on teachers and administrators to sufficiently meet the growing needs of today's youth.

Considering Senate Bill 367 from last year's session has yet to be successfully implemented, I have real concerns with adding another social mandate to the curriculum of our teachers when their plates are already full.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.