

KANSAS MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

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

Testimony presented to the House Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony 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, for-profit and non-profit organizations 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.

The Kansas Mental Health Coalition opposes HB 2243 allowing school safety officers to use physical restraints. The Coalition supports the work of the Emergency Safety Intervention Task Force and the 2016 legislation regarding seclusion and restraint in schools. The policy endorsed by the Task Force and passed into law exempts certified law enforcement officers from the mechanical restraint prohibition when they are carrying out their law enforcement duties. Appropriate protective or stabilizing devices are also exempted.

The 2016 legislation was important because we know that restraint is all too often the “go to” technique for managing behaviors and the vast majority of restraints are used on children with special education needs. Seclusion, restraint and other aversive interventions in schools cause unnecessary trauma and injury to America’s children. The research shows that children with mental health disorders commonly have a history of experienced trauma. We believe that statewide standards that ensure school staff everywhere are properly trained to use alternatives to physical intervention go a long way toward protecting children.

There are numerous alternatives to restraint and seclusion, including positive behavioral interventions and supports and other de-escalation techniques. Efforts to reduce restraint and seclusion should be part of a strategy for school-wide safety and should include the development of district-wide policies, training for all educational staff, crisis preparation, interagency cooperation and student/parent participation. Proactive approaches need to be used, e.g., positive behavior interventions and supports that are safe, effective, and evidence-based. Research demonstrates that the use of preventative and positive approaches is a cost-saving approach that changes how schools respond to students, improving student behavior by promoting and reinforcing desired behaviors and eliminating the unintended reinforcement of and need to respond to problem behaviors.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 2243. We hope that mutually supportive solutions can be incorporated that do not expand the use of physical restraints in schools.

Please direct questions to the Kansas Mental Health Coalition, Amy Campbell, lobbyist, campbell525@sbcglobal.net 785-969-1617.