



**Testimony to the House Education
Committee Senate Bill 100
Testimony by Kyle Kessler, Executive Director**

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Mister Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Kyle Kessler. I am the Executive Director for the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc. Our Association represents the 26 licensed Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in Kansas that provide behavioral health services in all 105 counties, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. In Kansas, CMHCs are the local Mental Health Authorities coordinating the delivery of publicly funded community-based mental health services. As part of licensing regulations, CMHCs are required to provide services to all Kansans needing them, regardless of their ability to pay. This makes the community mental health system the “safety net” for Kansans with mental health needs. CMHCs served over 135,000 Kansans in 2016, which we believe is more than ever before.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 100 which would amend the Nursing Service Scholarship Program to give priority when awarding scholarships to an applicant whose sponsor is a mental health or treatment facility. The changes contained in SB 100 would assist our state in addressing the current and growing shortage of mental health nurses not only in CMHCs, but also our State Mental Health Hospitals (SMHs) in Osawatometie and Larned.

Nurses play a vital role in the operations of CMHCs and as we move forward with providing whole person, integrated care, and we expect to utilize nursing services to a greater extent than we do currently. The coordinated delivery of health care services truly has the potential to be a major part of the next generation of health care service delivery.

We experienced this next generation of health care for two years when Kansas exercised the option to start Medicaid Health Homes. The role of health homes was to provide integrated care to bridge behavioral health and primary care needs, and in a short amount of time achieved improved health care and cost avoidance for a very vulnerable segment of the population. Unfortunately, the State ended this program last year for budget reasons.

We feel like this is an important issue to bring up as it relates to SB 100, in that as a CMHC system we hired dozens of LPNs and RNs to perform these integrated care functions. We hope that future models of health care financing will incentivize this type of work so that we may return to achieving positive whole health outcomes for our patients.

Our Association has put forth an initiative known as Mental Health 2020 (MH 2020) to help address the workforce shortage of psychiatrists, to establish more community crisis stabilization centers and to restore funding for CMHCs that has eroded over the last ten years. We feel that SB 100 is a natural fit to our ongoing efforts in these areas. Workforce challenges will persist even with its passage, but this is an excellent asset in helping to address these challenges. We would ask you to support this legislation and pass it favorably out of Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today, and I will stand for questions at the appropriate time.