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Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 333

**Presented to the Senate Education Committee
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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition of Senate Bill 333. The Jason Flatt Act was enacted in 2016 to ensure all school personnel receive training to address the silent epidemic that is killing Kansas children: child suicide. Our concern is that SB 333 could significantly weaken the efforts of this Act.

Before getting into the specifics of SB 333, I want to revisit why the Jason Flatt Act is so important. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the third leading cause of death among U.S. children 10-14 and second leading cause among persons 15-34 years of age.¹ Across the nation, it is now just as likely that a middle-school child will die from suicide as they would a traffic accident.² According to the Jason Foundation, more teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, and chronic lung disease, combined.³ This information takes into account only confirmed suicides, and excludes the many single-car accidents and other tragic deaths where suicide is the expected cause and could increase the number of suicide deaths significantly. Unfortunately, Kansas statistics indicate a trend similar to the rest of the nation. According to the State Child Death Review Board (SCDRB) of Kansas, the rate of suicides by Kansas youth continues to climb, despite a decline in the overall rate of child deaths. In the past decade the rate of child suicide more than doubled from 1 death per 100,000 population to 2.5 deaths per 100,000 population between the years of 2006 and 2015.⁴

While this data is discouraging, there is hope. According to The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, suicides are often preventable. They indicate that 90% of the young people who die by suicide have mental health conditions often which are undiagnosed or untreated, at the time of their death. "As children and teens spend a significant amount of their young lives in school, the personnel that interact with them on

a daily basis are in a prime position to recognize the signs of mental health conditions and suicide risk and make the appropriate referrals for help. To be able to do this, they will need effective training to acquire the necessary skills and confidence to intervene with youth at risk, and mandated training is one way to ensure that all school personnel have a baseline understanding of suicide risk and the referral process.”⁵

The sensitivities surrounding suicide attempts and deaths have led to this problem receiving far too little attention, so, as the mother of a child who died by suicide and someone who has provided emotional support for many families devastated by such a loss, I was particularly pleased that Kansas took a strong stance to create prevention awareness in our schools in 2016. The Jason Flatt Act set the stage for all school personnel to receive training, to do what we can to stop the unnecessary deaths of these kids. SB 333 weakens what was developed in three distinct ways:

1. Page 1, line 9 and 10 changes the requirement from “shall provide suicide awareness and prevention programming...” to “shall develop a plan to provide suicide awareness and prevention programming...”
2. Page 1, line 10 and 11 changes the requirement from providing the programming to “all school staff” to “selected school staff”. While the selection of staff is to be based on the extent of their interaction with children, one never knows what a bus driver, janitor, lunch assistant, or other staff might notice, if they are trained to know about suicide prevention.
3. Page 1, line 22 changes the minimum from “at least one hour of training each calendar year” to striking “at least one hour of”, creating no minimum time frame.

Clearly, the tragedy of suicide does not stop with adults, but impacts our most vulnerable: our children. You might very well know family members, teachers, and others who have been impacted by these tragedies. Kansas statistics would indicate that this is not the time to loosen the requirement for training our school personnel on suicide awareness. I urge you to oppose SB 333. Thank you for your consideration.

¹ National Vital Statistics System, National Center for Health Statistics, CDC. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC using WISQARS™. Available at https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/leading_causes_of_death_by_age_group_2015-a.pdf

² National Vital Statistics System, National Center for Health Statistics, CDC. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC using WISQARS™. Available at https://www.cdc.gov/injury/images/lc-charts/leading_causes_of_injury_deaths_unintentional_injury_2015_1050w760h.gif

³ Facts & Stats-The Jason Foundation. <http://jasonfoundation.com/youth-suicide/facts-stats/jasonfoundation.com/> Accessed 2 Feb. 2018.

⁴ 2017 SCDRB Annual Report. Oct. 2017, www.ag.ks.gov/about-the-office/affiliated-orgs/scdrb Accessed 2 Feb. 2018.

⁵ State Laws on Suicide Prevention Training for School Personnel. American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 31 Mar. 2016, www.congressweb.com/assets/BackgroundDocuments/70147535-0C42-B1F3-E3DB3ED529C97A80/School%20Personnel%20Training%20Overview_6.pdf. Accessed 2 Feb.2018