



KANSAS ADJUTANT GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT
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Testimony on House Bill 2365
Providing for Confidential Communication of Kansas National Guard Members in Peer
to Peer Support Counseling Sessions
Presented to the House Committee on Veterans and Military
February 19, 2019

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding HB 2365. I would like to begin by thanking the members of the committee for your continued support of our Guardsmen and veterans across our great state.

The Service Member and Dependent Support Team (SMDST) supports our Kansas National Guardsmen with issues in relationships, finances, job loss, work issues, health, and deployment issues all of which impact family members as well. Each week they average more than 20 meetings with service members that need their support. Over time these meetings result in a buildup of stress that compounds with each interaction. If unaddressed, this stress can result in unhealthy habits and unsuccessful coping strategies. After years of helping our service members get through their own struggles, one of our care providers committed suicide this past summer. This tragic event brought to the forefront the reality that we must care for those who care for others.

A chance to talk through issues as they occur helps to alleviate mounting stress and pressure. With this in mind, a strong Peer to Peer Support Program was identified as an immediate resource we could make available to members of the SMDST. However, the most critical element of a successful Peer to Peer Program is that the communication during a peer session remain confidential so the individual seeking help can talk without fear of the details of their discussion being made public. Kansas Statute Number 60-473 provides this protection for law enforcement and emergency services personnel but does not extend this same protection to members of the Kansas National Guard serving under the Department of the Adjutant General of Kansas. When asked about their programs, several law enforcement entities across the state stated emphatically that "without confidentiality their members would not participate in the program."

HB 2365 would make the necessary changes to the statute to add members of the Kansas National Guard to the list of protected individuals when conducting peer to peer counseling sessions and ensure these behavioral health professionals have the support they need to safely carry out their difficult mission. For these reasons, I would like to express my support for HB 2037.

On behalf of the men and women in the Adjutant General's Department, thank you again for your continued support and thank you for the great honor of allowing us to defend our home state and nation. We know we could not do what we do without your support.

Respectfully submitted by:

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19 February 2019