



March 10, 2022

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Wichita Regional Chamber and our roughly 1,500 members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 2281, AN ACT concerning public health; establishing 988 as the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in Kansas; providing for the Kansas department for aging and disability services to provide oversight and support to hotline centers; prescribing hotline center duties and provision of services; telecommunication providers duties; collection and disbursement of fees for the 988 hotline.

HB 2281, as amended, would create the Living, Investing in Values, and Ending Suicide (LIVES) Act (Act). The Act would establish 988 as the Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Hotline (Hotline) in Kansas. The bill would outline the responsibilities of the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS), Hotline centers, and service providers relating to the Act. The bill would also create the 988 and prepaid wireless 988 fees, and the 988 Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Crisis Hotline Fund (Hotline Fund), and the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics Fund (CCBHC Fund).

A number of years ago the Chamber identified workforce, and more specifically the lack thereof, as the number one issue faced by our members and slowing economic growth in our region. Not long thereafter, as we engaged with business, community and political leaders in south-central Kansas, it became evident unaddressed issues in the area of mental and behavioral health treatments were significant contributors not only to our workforce challenges, but were also driving up costs unnecessarily for corrections and law enforcement budgets. Therefore, the Chamber has been working with leaders to find solutions that enhance our region and the state's ability to provide the necessary tools and assistance necessary to help those not just in crisis, but to help those in need before they reach crisis level. Simply stated, addressing mental and behavioral health issues benefits business, our local and state government budgets and our communities as whole, including our fellow citizens the most in need.

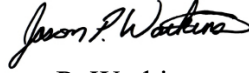
I'm speaking to you today as a representative of business and therefore, I come to you with a business perspective. However, I would be remiss if I didn't at least mention the extraordinary human element that exists here. Mental health illnesses are real, they are hard and they can be devastating. And too often they result in death. On a personal level, that should be unacceptable to every single one of us.

H.B 2281 is not a fix all. Its passage will not heal every illness or even prevent every death from overdose or suicide, but it will save some. In addition to saving lives, this legislation will also improve lives based on its increased funding for Community Behavioral Health Clinics. It's a common-sense approach and package of good and sound public policy.

Therefore, we would request that the Committee report H.B. 2281 favorable for passage.

Thank you and I'm happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason P. Watkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end.

Jason P. Watkins