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March 10, 2022

Chairman Finch, and Members of the House Committee on Energy, Utilities, and Telecommunications,

My name is Emily Nichols, and I am the current President of the Kansas Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO). Suicide prevention is an issue we need to be dealing with in Kansas. Finding adequate support for Kansans struggling with mental health has been a lifetime effort.

As the Director of Emergency Communications for Dickinson County, I know firsthand about the struggle citizens face with mental health issues and stigma. I feel confident that the implementation of 988 will provide Kansans in crisis with a uniform process for accessing trained mental health professionals and will dramatically affect the suicide rate in Kansas.

Kansas 911 supports HB2281, but our 911 industry maintains concerns about competing funding from telecommunication devices fees for emergency telecommunication. Should there be an implementation of such fees, there is worry that the funding of 911 will be sacrificed for the funding of 988 services. Such a cut would be a disservice to the citizens of Kansas who utilize the 911 service 24/7, and our public safety telecommunicators who handle those calls.

911 is the emergency number people know, and we look forward to an ongoing relationship with the 988 community to ensure a warm handoff of calls from 911 to a trained mental health professional. Our citizens will reap the benefits of the fostered partnership between behavioral health and first responders for years to come.

In closing, we welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsors to address the issues raised in my testimony. The 911 industry looks forward to the successful implementation of 988 in Kansas and throughout the country to help our fellow Americans in crisis. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this critical issue.

Respectfully,

Emily Nichols, President