



Date: Feb. 22, 2021

To: House Health and Human Services Committee

From: Monica Kurz, LMSW

Vice President for External Programming, Kansas Suicide Prevention HQ

RE: H.B. 2281 proponent

Chairperson Landwehr and members of the House Health and Human Services Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.B. 2281. I am Monica Kurz, LMSW and Vice President for External Programming at Kansas Suicide Prevention HQ. Kansas Suicide Prevention HQ provides resources, education, and counseling services for all Kansans with the goal of preventing suicide and saving lives. We serve Kansas as a National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (Lifeline) provider for all 105 counties in Kansas, and the only organization to do so in 104 of those counties.

Our organization is working in challenging times for Kansans. The Kansas Department for Health and Environment's Vital Statistics Reports show suicides have increased by 15 percent over the past 10 years. Although we are in dark times, the Lifeline brings hope. A 2007 study published in *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* shows that 56 percent of all callers who call suicide hotlines no longer feel suicidal after their call.

We know Kansans need this service. A teenager recently contacted our center after having self-harmed and was feeling suicidal. They were experiencing bullying and family problems. Our counselor assessed for safety and then stayed on the line with them until the suicidal ideation and self-harm impulse passed.

While some callers feel better after their call, others may need additional resources to help them stay safe and to avoid expensive hospitalizations. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care recommends a continuum of crisis services, which often starts when someone calls a crisis line. The caring counselor should help the person in crisis navigate other services, which includes mobile crisis units—behavioral health professionals who meets the person on-scene, and crisis stabilization facilities and crisis residential facilities, which are out-patient alternatives to hospitalization.

In order to facilitate expansion and access to crisis services such as these, this past summer, Sen. Jerry Moran passed S. 2661, a law that requires all telecommunications carriers to convert the current 10-digit Lifeline phone number into 988. This is a 3-digit emergency phone number similar to 911 that will be operational by July 16, 2022.

As we elevate the Lifeline into the status of an emergency number, Vibrant Emotional Health, the administrator of the Lifeline, estimates this will increase calls between 300-800 percent. As

Kansans call 988 in a state of severe crisis, we will need local communities to have infrastructure like mobile crisis response, crisis stabilization facilities, and crisis residential facilities.

We know coming up with a plan to prepare for 988 is a multi-faceted issue, which is why we have worked collaboratively with partners in different capacities including participating in a planning coalition convened by KDADS. This coalition includes all Lifeline Centers: COMCARE of Sedgwick County and KSPHQ as current providers and Johnson County Mental Health as a Lifeline applicant center. Our other equally-important partners include law enforcement, mental health advocacy organizations, 911 dispatchers, and telecommunications companies. KDADS has also served as a vital partner from the beginning and has worked with us in providing guidance of a timeline of the rollout of all tasks that are required of KDADS through this bill. Through the work of planning for 988 it is clear all stakeholders agree on the invaluable nature of this service and the need to fund it adequately.

H.B. 2281 will prepare our state for full implementation of 988 and associated crisis services. It authorizes KDADS to designate call centers as 988 centers and creates guidelines and standards for adequate trainings for 988 counselors. It creates a funding mechanism consistent with the bill on the federal level, which authorizes states to raise a phone fee. However, this phone fee must be used strictly for 988, outreach, and crisis stabilization services.

H.B. 2281 will raise a phone fee of only \$6 per phone line per year. This phone fee will pay for the \$3 million KDADS estimates 988 centers like ours will need to build capacity to assist an additional 41,000-162,000 calls from Kansans in crisis. This bill will also raise an additional \$22 million for mobile crisis response, crisis stabilization services, follow-up services from hospitals, and costs for KDADS to assist local communities in coordinating these services. This funding level is consistent with the conclusions drawn by the Mental Health Task Force. This year, Gov. Kelly's budget calls for \$5 million to go toward mobile crisis response. Passage of H.B. 2281 will provide funding to ensure this service is robustly available in all areas of the state while also funding the complimentary service of the crisis line. Identifying a consistent and reliable funding stream will allow Kansans everywhere to be assured that no matter what time of day, year after year, someone will be available to answer the call when they or their loved ones are at risk. 988 is coming to Kansas in July of 2022; we have an opportunity to make sure that we are prepared. We recommend that H.B. 2281 pass as written to achieve these goals.

Thank you for your time and attention on suicide prevention services. I appreciate this opportunity for all of us to work together to save Kansans' lives. I am happy to answer questions at the appropriate time.

