



STATE OF KANSAS
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

DEREK SCHMIDT
ATTORNEY GENERAL

MEMORIAL HALL
120 SW 10TH AVE., 2ND FLOOR
TOPEKA, KS 66612-1597
(785) 296-2215 • FAX (785) 296-6296
WWW.AG.KS.GOV

**Testimony of Office of the Attorney General in support of House Bill 2281
Presented to the House Committee on Health and Human Services**

By Michelle McCormick, LMSW
Director of Victim Services, Office of the Attorney General

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Chair Landwehr and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2281. My name is Michelle McCormick and I am the director of victim services and state victim rights coordinator for Attorney General Derek Schmidt. In this capacity, I also serve as the supervisor to the Youth Suicide Prevention coordinator which was a position created in the Office of the Attorney General in 2019. I also serve on the 988 implementation coalition, as coordinated by the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) and the Kansas Suicide Prevention Coalition.

The issue of youth suicide is of great concern to Attorney General Schmidt, who in 2018 and with the help of the Tower Mental Health Foundation, created the Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force in response to learning about the increasing rate of youth suicides in Kansas. The Task Force accumulated a wealth of information which has set the priorities for the youth suicide prevention efforts at the attorney general's office.

Our office is not alone in our concerns about the impact of suicide on Kansans, both for youth and across the lifespan. Our office has been collaborating with our partners at KDADS, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), and other stakeholders to improve communication, data sharing, and collaboration, so that we can reach our common goals of improving access to mental health services and zero suicides in Kansas.

One significant step in the direction of increasing access to mental health services will be the implementation of the 988 suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in Kansas. We believe the 988 hotline will increase access to critical crisis and stabilization services to those who need to reach the providers of these services, including Kansas youth.

However, the success of this tool will depend on the state creating reliable and sustainable funding for the 988 hotline, as well as support for the full range of services that will need to be in place for any 988 callers.

One of the priorities for the attorney general's youth suicide prevention efforts has been to explore the development of an app to be used as a communication tool for youth, in order to provide them with a "youth friendly" option to connect with a mental health professional or law enforcement officer in order to get assistance during a suicide crisis. In our collaboration with state partners, we learned that 988 implementation is going to include an option for texting, much like the current national suicide prevention lifeline has in place. Upon learning this, our Office has determined that the app that we have been pursuing will have the best possible outcomes if developed in such a way that it could enhance or complement the services that will be provided by the 988 hotline. Therefore, the success of these two projects are dependent on a strong and coordinated implementation. While to date we do not know exactly how the back end response to both systems will work, we do envision that both systems will work together and enhance the system of response we currently have in Kansas. The Attorney General's Office will remain in close contact with the 988 stakeholders as we develop these services, ultimately to the benefit of Kansans who need access to these life-saving services.

Thank you again for your consideration of House Bill 2281.

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