



# Sunflower Foundation

HEALTH CARE FOR KANSANS

Testimony of the **Sunflower Foundation** to the  
House Health and Human Services Committee  
HB 2281 • February 15, 2022

Chair Landwehr and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in favor of HB 2281 to establish and implement 988 as the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in Kansas. This committee is painfully aware of the tremendous need that exists across the state to better support Kansans living with a mental illness and those who find themselves in times of crisis. HB 2281 will provide the resources needed to ensure Kansas has crisis call centers available 24/7 with trained staff, support development of mobile crisis teams, and help establish/augment crisis stabilization programs throughout the state.

According to the Kansas Health Institute, suicide rates have increased by nearly 45% statewide over the past two decades. While rates increased gradually in the early part of the 2000's, suicide rates have accelerated in recent years and experts fear pandemic stressors could worsen the problem. Rural and frontier counties have been especially hard hit with state data showing suicide rates having increased nearly 60 percent in the same time period, significantly outpacing the increases in mid-sized cities and urban areas. Suicide is now the ninth-leading cause of death in the state and the second leading cause of death for Kansans aged 15 to 34.

In 2020, *America's Health Rankings*, the longest running state-by-state analysis of the nation's health, released its 30<sup>th</sup> edition. Since its first report in 1990, Kansas, when compared to other states, has experienced the greatest decline in its overall health ranking, falling 17 places from number 12 to 29. And the state's ranking fell yet again in 2021 to 30. As we begin to emerge from the worst public health crisis in a century, we collectively have much work to do in improving the health of the people who call our state home. As a health philanthropy committed to serving all 105 counties in Kansas and one that has invested millions in the mental health system, Sunflower Foundation is privileged to continue to work in communities of all sizes, alongside community members and leaders all of whom committed to making their towns healthy- physically, mentally and economically. Strong, economically viable communities need healthy people and healthy people require timely access to mental health and crisis services.

Thank you for your leadership, and for your sustained efforts to support improvements to the state's mental health system.

Sincerely,

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