



Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee Testimony in Support of SB 193

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Mister Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Kyle Kessler. I am the Executive Director for the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc. Our Association represents the 26 licensed Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in Kansas that provide behavioral health services in all 105 counties, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. We are the State's public mental health safety net.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of SB 193. This bill would align clinical social work with the other behavioral health professions licensed by the Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board (BSRB), thereby making it easier for individuals licensed in other states to gain licensure in Kansas.

One of our goals as an Association is to help address workforce shortage challenges in medical and clinical staff for the CMHCs. Recruiting and retaining high quality medical and clinical staff is a daily effort for CMHCs. The workforce shortage of Qualified Mental Health Professionals (QMHPs) and medical staff has become a significant challenge.

CMHCs compete with Managed Care Organizations (MCOs), the Veterans Administration (VA), schools, hospitals, and now other states such as Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma for qualified staff. These neighboring states are participating in federal programs that will allow for greater reimbursement opportunities. These include the Excellence in Mental Health Act and Medicaid Expansion. Although funding is certainly one part of the equation, public policy initiatives such as SB 193 provide an additional tool in the work force toolbox to adding necessary staff.

CMHCs around the state are working to recruit staff and if the passage of SB 193 results in the addition of any clinical staff at all, which we believe it will, then this would make excellent public policy. Again, we appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of SB 193, and I will stand for questions at the appropriate time.