

**Testimony to the House Committee on Health and Human Services**

**House Bill #2281 “Establishing and implementing 988 as the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in Kansas”**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, my name is Tim DeWeese. I am the Director of Johnson County Mental Health Center, which is a department of Johnson County (KS) Government. We employ more than 360 staff who provide behavioral health services to more than 17,000 county residents annually. Johnson County Mental Health Center began operation in 1962 providing outpatient services in one location. Today, the center provides services in four separate facilities located throughout the county and serves as the local mental health authority coordinating the delivery of publicly funded community-based “safety-net” mental health services. The Mental Health Center is licensed by the State of Kansas as a Community Mental Health Center and has earned a three-year accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) International.

I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony in **support** of this bill which establishes 988 as the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in Kansas, ensuring a mental health safety net by providing emotional support for people in distress, reducing suicides, mental health crises and providing a pathway to well-being for all Kansans.

The statistics regarding deaths by suicide are of grave concern to our community and for several years now, we have referred to the rate of death by suicide as not only a public mental health crisis but a public health crisis. Johnson County Mental Health Center has operated a 24- hour, 7 day a week crisis line for our community for over thirty years taking more than 30,000 calls annually. Last year we became a part of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL), a national network of local crisis centers that provides support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. The NSPL will transition from a 10-digit phone number to 988 by July of 2022, making it easier for individuals to know what number to call when in crisis.

We support the State of Kansas identifying and committing the resources necessary to fully fund the necessary infrastructure through the collection of fees via cellular phone bills to support increasing the in-state answer rate and access to crisis services. Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) across the state are actively involved in their communities to partner with crisis call centers to ensure individuals in need are connected to services and supports, including crisis response and stabilization.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and let me know if you have questions or need additional information.