

Carolyn Evers

Lawrence, KS

Testimony in Support of H.B. 2281

Our son, age 55, a smart, successful high school athletic director for Mulvane, KS. took his own life on September 14, 2021. We had no idea he was suffering because we were separated from him for health reasons. With him involved in high school athletics, he was at high risk of contracting Covid and as his elderly parents, we were at high risk of serious complications from it. So he stayed away and our phone calls from him became fewer and farther between. We thought he was just really busy because Covid had wreaked havoc for educators' jobs. He was single and worked in his community about 12-13 hours a day. He could not confide in community members or go to local services because small towns gossip and he wanted to be strong example for his kids. We did learn that he reached out for help from the VA in Wichita and had one appointment there, but the wait time for appointments were probably a deterrent to him for seeking more help. He was alone and with nowhere to turn, at least that he knew of, nowhere that was safe for his privacy or that could be accessed in a moment's notice. We need to keep this from happening to anyone else by having a well-publicized 988 number with trained professionals answering around the clock.

Professionals are trained to coach and counsel someone through this type of crisis, not just be sympathetic listeners.

Having a dedicated mental health line would mean that people calling could be free from guilt about the concern that they might be taking away resources from something they might consider a more important crisis than their own. Our son had lots of pride, too much. He would have never called 911 to report an "emergency" about depression, anxiety or suicidal thoughts.

Our son, Doug Evers, was only a couple of years away from retiring from his job as vice-principal and athletic director from a Kansas high school. He had recently gotten a real estate license with plans to pursue that after his retirement from the school system. He had nieces and nephews who he adored and who all looked up to him. He had a future! But in a moment of crisis, with nowhere to turn, he changed the course of our family dynamics forever.

Please pass this bill to make it simple for busy people to reach out for professional help. Thank you.