

Testimony by Tim DeWeese, Director of Johnson County Mental Health Center to the House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice in support of House Bill 2487

Establishing a “Good Samaritan Law” in Kansas to provide immunity from prosecution for certain drug crimes when persons seek or provide medical assistance related to the use of a controlled substance

January 25, 2024

Chairman Owens and members of the committee, my name is Tim DeWeese, and I serve as the director of Johnson County Mental Health Center. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today in **support** of HB 2487.

Johnson County Mental Health Center began operating in 1962 by providing outpatient services with four employees in one location. Today, we have over 400 employees in five locations throughout Johnson County providing mental health and substance use treatment services to 12,000 residents annually. We are a department of Johnson County Government, licensed by the State of Kansas as a Community Mental Health Center and accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) International. JCMHC is certified as a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) by the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services.

In 2022, together with community partners from public health, law enforcement, school districts, nonprofit organizations, and individuals and families with lived experience, Johnson County Mental Health Center led the formation of the *Johnson County Prevention and Recovery Coalition*. The coalition’s mission is to reduce substance use and overdose deaths in our community through education and prevention programs, treatment services, recovery supports, and harm reduction strategies.

The opioid epidemic in our community has been worsened by an increase in fentanyl overdose and poisoning deaths, many of which are unintentional and could be preventable if bystanders are able to immediately intervene by administering Narcan and calling 911 for help. We should be empowering Kansans to save lives without a second thought, not leaving them afraid to make the choice between saving someone’s life or making a phone call that could send them to jail.

As a state, we have taken many positive steps that keep Kansans safe and alive, from making Narcan more accessible in Kansas communities to allowing testing supplies that prevent Kansans from unknowingly ingesting lethal doses of fentanyl. Passing this bill is the next critical step toward prioritizing saving lives—Kansas is one of only two states in the country without some form of a “Good Samaritan Law” for opioid overdoses on the books.

Because so many of our neighbors have already enacted these laws, we can see the impact they have on preventing overdose deaths in our communities. In a review of 17 studies, the U.S. Government Accountability Office found the studies collectively point to “a pattern of lower rates of opioid-related overdose deaths” among states with the laws, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recognized such laws as an evidence-based practice that has been successfully implemented around the country.

Every overdose death we prevent—**every life we save**—provides that person with another opportunity to connect with programs and services that provide treatment and support recovery. Because this bill is another step toward saving lives in Johnson County and Kansas, Johnson County Mental Health Center supports HB 2487 and asks the members of the committee to recommend its passage.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out.