



# Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas

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Opposition Testimony of HB 2444 with Amended Changes  
Committee on K-12 Education Budget  
March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Chair Williams and members of the Committee, my name is Eric Thomason. I serve as Vice President of Behavioral Health and Addiction Treatment services for Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas (CHC/SEK). CHC/SEK is a 501(c)(3) public charity, federally qualified health center (FQHC), and Kansas not-for-profit corporation. We are proud to serve 10 counties throughout Southeast Kansas. We employ over 800 employees. CHC/SEK served 72,315 unique patients in 2022 accounting for 273,156 visits, including 40,837 behavioral health visits with 10,949 school behavioral health visits. Please note, the school based visits were therapy conducted on school site by a master's prepared clinician holding board certification through the Kansas Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board. These numbers do not reflect the work completed by community health workers.

I appreciate the opportunity to present opposition testimony to House Bill 2444 with recommended amended changes. This bill moves to expand the mental health intervention teams for Kansas school districts. As currently written, this bill further restricts access to behavioral healthcare by limiting participating organizations to Community Mental Health Centers only. These regulations further reduce access to behavioral healthcare, most notably in rural areas of Kansas which already suffer from disproportional under representation of behavioral health services.

CHC/SEK provides daily clinical support to 18 school districts throughout southeast Kansas. In addition to daily clinical support, we provide clinical outreach services to 39 different educational institutions. CHC/SEK serves as crisis counseling response service for nine counties in southeast Kansas through a partnership with the interlocal, Southeast Kansas Education Service Center (Greenbush). We are the largest school behavioral health provider in southeast Kansas. We are the largest behavioral health care provider in southeast Kansas. CHC/SEK wants the opportunity to provide meaningful interventions to the children in southeast Kansas and the staff in each school district we serve. Sadly, no one organization or organization type is able to meet the behavioral health demands across our state. We must call on all capable and willing organizations to work together to help make tomorrow better than it is today.

I respectfully recommend the following change:

1. Remove restrictive language that identifies community mental health centers as the only available service provider, in favor of the utilization of community based providers further defined as 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to create meaningful systems to better serve the children of Kansas.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eric Thomason', is located below the text.

Eric Thomason, PMHNP  
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