



Testimony to the Special Committee on Federal and State Affairs

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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. The 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. In Kansas, CMHCs are the local Mental Health Authorities coordinating the delivery of publicly funded community-based mental health services. As part of licensing regulations, CMHCs are required to provide services to all Kansans needing them, regardless of their ability to pay. This makes the community mental health system the “safety net” for Kansans with mental health needs.

Research shows an increase in behavioral health treatment needs across the country and Kansas is no exception. CMHCs treated over 135,000 Kansans last year that ranged in acuity from moderate mental health treatment needs to adults with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness such as schizophrenia and children with Severe Emotional Disturbance. This is an increase of more than 10,000 patients than the previous year.

Our Association appreciates the opportunity to testify today on sports betting. We feel that this is the appropriate time to review the history of the legislative commitment made to helping those with gambling and other addictions through funding the Problem Gambling and Addictions Grant Fund, which was established to receive two percent of gambling revenue from state-owned casinos in Kansas. Last year was the first time in many years that the Legislature made the decision to restore some of the funding commitment to this area where it previously had been used to backfill regular Medicaid expenses.

If the Legislature approves sports betting in Kansas, we feel that a similar commitment should be made to allocate funding for additional addictions treatment. We should make every effort to ensure that those who gamble, do so in a responsible fashion and can access treatment if necessary.

Research has shown that most problem gamblers have a co-occurring disorder and so it makes sense to look at this issue from a broad perspective. According to survey results from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions which is cited on the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) website, nearly three-quarters of pathological gamblers had an alcohol use disorder (73.2 percent), 38.1 percent had a drug use disorder and 60.4 percent had nicotine dependence.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today, and I would be glad to stand for questions at the appropriate time.