



**Testimony to House Health and Human Services Committee
on House Bill 2281**

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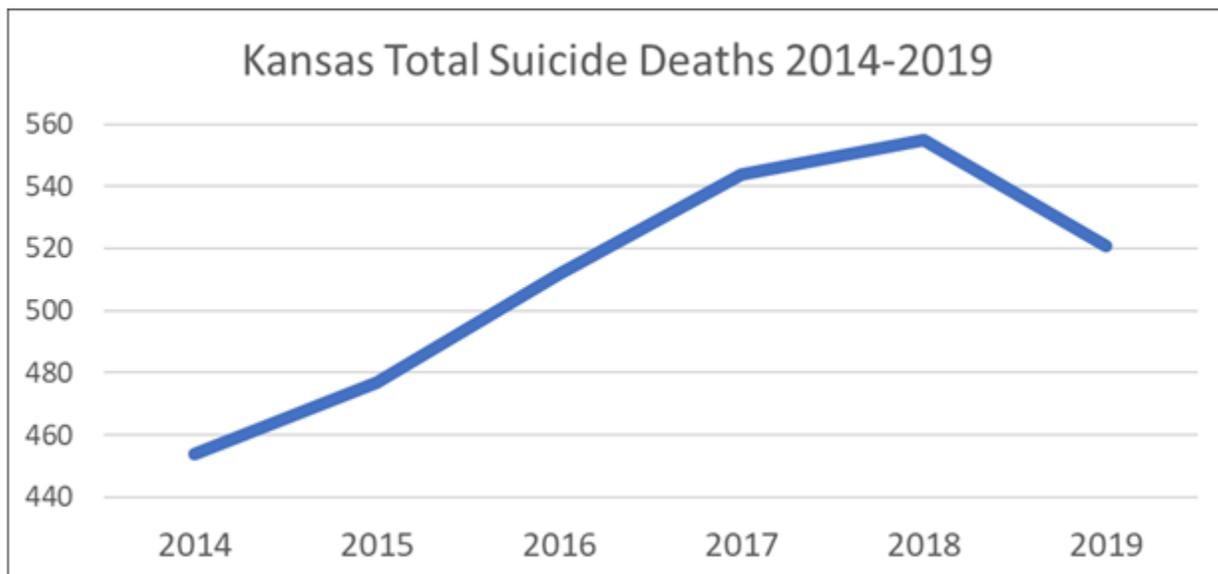
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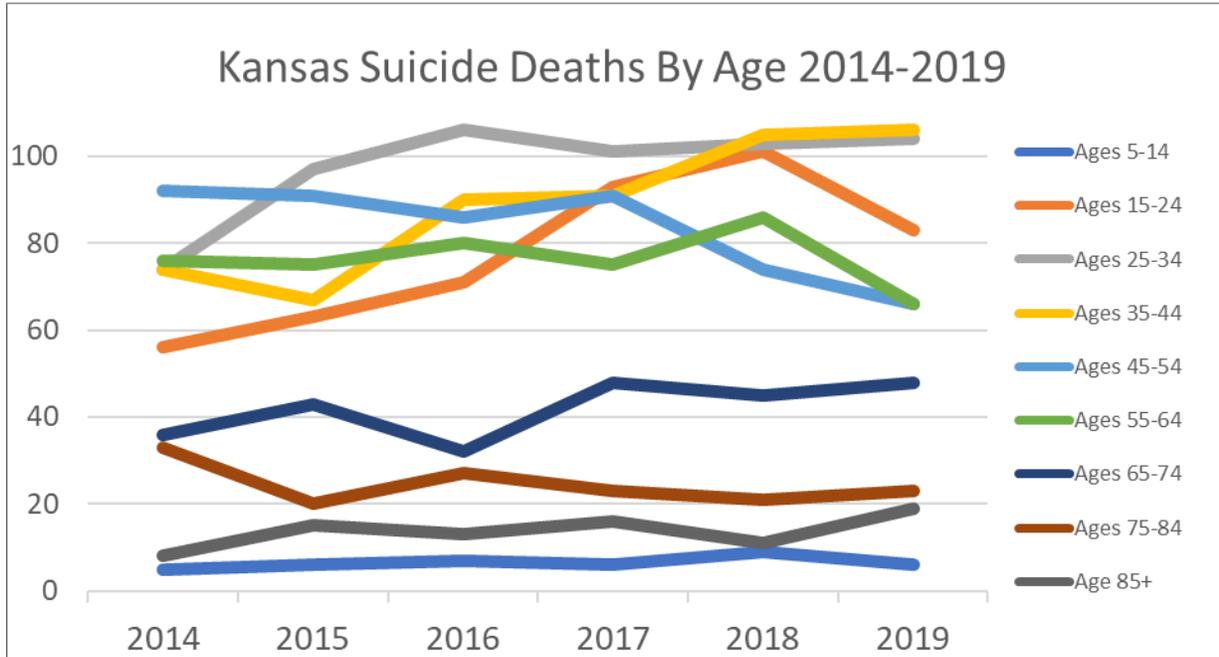
Madam Chair and members of the Committee, my name is Kyle Kessler, and I am the Executive Director for the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc. Our Association represents the 26 licensed Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in Kansas that provide behavioral health services in all 105 counties, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. 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.

We appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Committee today in support of HB 2281, which establishing 988 as the suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in Kansas.

The statistics around suicide, and especially youth suicide, are of great concern for our Association. For several years now, we have referred to the rate of death by suicide as a public mental health crisis.

Thankfully, according to the *2019 Kansas Annual Summary of Vital Statistics* from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), the overall number of suicides decreased from 2018 to 2019.¹ However, the second leading cause of death of people aged 15 to 44 remains suicide. Based on the reported numbers from 2014 to 2019, our state experienced a nearly 50 percent increase in deaths by suicide in the 15 to 24 age group.





The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) is 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 support increasing the in-state answer rate as well as ensuring that callers are connected to in-state resources. CMHCs across the state are actively involved in prevention efforts at the local level and will partner with hotline centers to ensure individuals in need are connected to services and supports, including crisis response and stabilization.

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

¹ Kansas Department of Health and Environment. (2019). *Annual summary of vital statistics*. Retrieved from https://www.kdheks.gov/phi/as/2019_Annual_Summary.pdf