



*Sedgwick County...
working for you*

COMCARE

A Licensed Community Mental Health Center and Certified Addiction Treatment Program
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Joan M. Tammany, LMLP
Executive Director

Testimony to the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee on Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics SB 138

Good afternoon, Mister Chair and members of the committee. My name is Joan Tammany, and I am the Executive Director of COMCARE of Sedgwick County, the community mental health center serving Sedgwick County. I want to thank you for allowing me to testify today and I also wish to express my genuine appreciation for this committee's work on behalf of mental health centers during the 2020 Legislative Session even though those gains were eventually eliminated from the budget due to COVID.

As will be or has been discussed by others presenting in favor of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, the needs in our communities are great and this model of service delivery is a critical step forward toward assuring timely access to high quality specialty services are available to all. Community mental health centers in Kansas have a long legacy of serving those with the highest needs and have done so through creative problem solving and strong partnerships in our community. But we have also done it with limited resources which has resulted in fostering disadvantages to our system of care. Pay is not equitable to other positions in our communities for specialty behavioral health providers which in turn has resulted in high turnover and frustration amongst our work force. It also presents challenges to those we serve as continuity of care is disrupted and many that we serve struggle to engage with one provider after another. This in turn impacts outcomes and increases utilization of more costly options like emergency departments or law enforcement. We can do better, and Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics is a solution that is working across the United States.

Mental health and addiction treatment when received in a timely way and delivered by high quality teams makes a difference in the lives of our family, friends, neighbors and community members. We must continue to promote hope and healing by supporting policy change and making investments in the critical infrastructure of community mental health centers. We are responsible for serving anyone regardless of their ability to pay and are held to licensing regulations that have a hefty administrative burden to sustain. We are not complaining, as it is in our missions to serve but to serve, we must advance our work toward a more integrated model of care – places people can access and get their whole health treated. Centers that help to reduce the impact of mental health and addiction and which allow for more strategic partnerships and host a full continuum of crisis services to minimize the impact of suicide in our communities. We recognize that certified community behavioral health clinics come with rigorous expectations, but it also standardizes expectations to assure that anyone regardless of the community he/she lives in has access to critical services. At the heart of the CCBHC model there is a universal set of requirements around staffing, service array, reporting requirements etc. with Medicaid payment rates that cover the real costs of delivering these enhanced services. But, more importantly more people get the services they need which is the most important part of this transformation.

Same Day Assessment Adult Mental Health Services: 316-660-7540 Adult Addiction Services: 316-660-7550
Children's Services: 316-660-9605 24-Hour Mental Health Emergency and Suicide Prevention Service: 316-660-7500

I look forward to a day when our staff stay with us because we are a robust and adequately funded center and patients no longer stop services because their provider has moved on due to pay issues and where warm handoffs to other providers of mental health and addiction services are the norm and patients transition between services within the same center – we all know that a simple referral to another agency often does not occur as the patient must now negotiate another system of care. This opportunity will save lives and allow our centers to invest in new evidence-based practices that are prohibitive under our current payment model.

We have experienced significant success with our crisis services since their expansion in 2015 with an investment from the state. We know from annual cost avoidance studies that our crisis services save our community and the state an average of greater than \$9 million a year. This is just the start of what can be achieved with a legislative commitment to Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics. This can result in reduced wait times for services, universal screenings for drug use, suicidality, anxiety, etc. at all levels of the organization which promotes prevention instead of crisis. And it allows for increased collaborations with law enforcement, emergency departments, and schools as it is anticipated from those who have pioneered this before us that turnover will be reduced and relationships between provider and patient can remain intact longer.

COMCARE and the other community mental health centers in Kansas are proud of the work we do, but as noted earlier, know that we can do better, and this bill is one means of getting there. With your support, we can move our system of care forward and increase the wellness of our communities.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I will stand for any questions. Thank you.