

Proponent Testimony on HB 2669  
House Health & Human Services  
Thursday, February 8, 2024

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am honored to testify in support of HB 2269 which aims to allocate funding for mental health services in schools. In my time at KDADS, I have witnessed firsthand the critical need for expanded mental health resources within our educational institutions and codifying the Mental Health Intervention Team program in statute.

Mental health is a cornerstone of overall well-being, and it profoundly impacts a student's ability to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. Unfortunately, many students face significant barriers to accessing the mental health support they desperately need. From anxiety and depression to trauma and substance abuse, the range of mental health challenges among our youth is vast and complex.

Implementing comprehensive mental health services in schools is a proactive and effective approach to addressing these challenges. By embedding mental health professionals within the educational environment, we can identify issues early, provide timely interventions, and support students in developing the coping skills necessary for lifelong mental wellness.

HB 2269 represents a crucial step towards ensuring that every student has access to the mental health services they require. The proposed funding will enable schools to work with CMHCs or other community providers to access additional counselors, psychologists, and social workers, expand mental health programming, and establish partnerships with community organizations to provide wraparound services.

While the definition in the bill of a CMHC clarifies that other providers may be approved by KDADS to provide MHIT services, greater clarity in the bill's language may help promote the understanding that this bill is not limiting the school district's choice in community providers.

Moreover, investing in mental health services in schools yields significant long-term benefits for both individuals and society as a whole. Research consistently demonstrates that early intervention and support for mental health issues in adolescence can lead to improved academic performance, reduced behavioral problems, decreased substance abuse, and lower rates of mental illness in adulthood.

Furthermore, addressing mental health concerns in schools fosters a positive and inclusive learning environment where all students feel valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential. By prioritizing mental health, we not only enhance academic outcomes but also promote the overall well-being and resilience of our future generations.

In conclusion, I urge you to support passage of HB 2269 and prioritize the mental health of our students. By allocating funding for mental health services in schools, we have an unprecedented opportunity to transform the lives of countless young people and build healthier, more resilient communities for generations to come.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Andrew Brown', with a long, sweeping underline.

Andrew Brown

Deputy Secretary for Programs