



Testimony to the House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice on House Bill 2328

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Chair Owens and members of the Committee, my name is Michelle Ponce. I am the Associate 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 behavioral health needs.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2328.

Over the last couple of years, deaths related to synthetic opioids, including fentanyl, have continued to rise. In 2021, they hit an all-time high after rising 23% over 2020. In Kansas, specifically, drugs were the underlying cause of death for 635 (416 of which were caused by opioids) Kansas residents in 2021, up from 432 in 2020.

We frequently hear stories about people accidentally overdosing, thinking they were taking one drug, when in fact it was fentanyl or another synthetic opioid. Many of these deaths are accidental and preventable. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, fentanyl is 50 to 100 times more powerful than morphine. Fentanyl and its numerous derivatives, or analogs, can be so powerful that a fatal dose may be invisible to the human eye.

We must employ a variety of strategies to decrease the risk of overdose death. The use of fentanyl test strips has been shown to be effective in detecting traces of fentanyl and fentanyl analogs in drug samples. These strips are easy to use and can typically provide results in less than five minutes.

This is a low cost, easily accessible tool that can help save lives. They’ve been proven to help individuals avoid accidental fentanyl or fentanyl analog ingestion. They shouldn’t be treated as drug paraphernalia, and this is one of the things we can do as a State to make an impact on this epidemic.

In summary, we feel that HB 2328 is a step in the right direction for Kansas to assist with the epidemic of fentanyl usage, and we urge your support.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.