

**Testimony by Tim DeWeese, Director of Johnson County Mental Health Center, to the House Committee on Health and Human Services in support of House Bill 2328**

***AN ACT concerning crimes, punishment and criminal procedure; relating to controlled substances definitions; excluding materials used to detect the presence of fentanyl, ketamine or gamma hydroxybutyric acid from the definition of drug paraphernalia***

**February 15, 2023**

Chair Owens and members of the committee, my name is Tim DeWeese, and I serve as the Director of Johnson County Mental Health Center. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today in **support** of HB 2328.

Johnson County Mental Health Center began operating in 1962 by providing outpatient services with four employees in one location. Today, we have over 400 employees in five locations throughout Johnson County providing mental health and substance use treatment services to 12,000 residents annually. We are a department of Johnson County Government, licensed by the State of Kansas as a Community Mental Health Center, and accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) International. Last July, we were provisionally certified as a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) by the Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services.

Together with community partners from public health, law enforcement, school districts, and nonprofit organizations, Johnson County Mental Health Center recently formed the *Johnson County Prevention and Recovery Coalition* to reduce substance use and overdose deaths in our community through education, prevention programs, treatment services, recovery supports, and harm reduction strategies.

The opioid epidemic has been worsened by an increase in fentanyl overdose and poisoning deaths. Many of those deaths are the result of individuals unknowingly ingesting an extremely lethal – albeit low – dose of fentanyl-laced medications. Harm reduction strategies, like the use of low-cost test strips detecting the presence of fentanyl, can significantly reduce the risk of overdose death and help us save lives in our community. Fentanyl test strips can also increase connections to substance use treatment services and prevention programs like the ones offered by Johnson County Mental Health Center.

Because harm reduction strategies like the low-cost test strips legalized by this legislation can save lives and connect those individuals to programs and services that provide treatment and support recovery, Johnson County Mental Health Center supports HB 2328 and asks the members of the committee to recommend its passage.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out.