



February 8, 2024

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Kansas Action for Children
Written-only neutral testimony for HB 2669
House Committee on Health and Human Services

Chairwoman Landwehr and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide neutral testimony for **HB 2669, which would codify the mental health intervention team (MHIT) into state law.**

Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We work across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families.

We are very supportive of the MHIT program and applaud its successes.

Since its initial implementation in 2018 through a budget proviso (and in each fiscal year since), the MHIT program has helped students and families navigate mental health services and break down barriers in place for youth to receive mental health services, particularly in school settings.¹ According to the Kansas Legislative Research Department,² the MHIT program has grown significantly since it was first implemented in 2018.

PARTICIPATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS			
Fiscal Year	Total Number of Students	Total Number of School Districts	Total Number of Schools
2019	1,708	9	82
2020	3,266	32	180
2021	4,711	56	212
2022	5,117	55	232
2023	6,014	67	349

¹ Calvert, J. (2024). *Mental Health Intervention Team Grant, presentation to Robert G. (Bob) Bethell Joint Committee on Home and Community Based Services and KanCare Oversight.* https://kslegislature.org/li/b2023_24/committees/ctte_jt_robert_g_bob_bethell_joint_committee_1/documents/testimony/20240202_18.pdf

² Kansas Legislative Research Department. (2024). *Mental Health Intervention Team Pilot Program.* https://kslegislature.org/li/b2023_24/committees/ctte_jt_robert_g_bob_bethell_joint_committee_1/documents/testimony/20240202_21.pdf

Now in its sixth year, the program reaches 90 school districts.³ For the first semester of the 2023-2024 school year, more than 5,700 students were served, including 477 foster youth.⁴ The statistics of the program speak for itself; the program is saving kids' lives and changing the trajectory of their lives.

The program reaches many areas of our state⁵ – but needs to continue expanding into more of our state's school districts.

The MHIT program removes numerous barriers to mental health care that negatively impact kids' lives by keeping kids in the classroom to keep learning. They only need to leave class for appointments – not missing hours of class time outside of the building. By receiving care inside the school building, students don't miss valuable class time driving to and from appointments, parents don't have to take time off work to take their kids to appointments, and the care is available year-round.

We would prefer to weigh in as a proponent on this bill, but we are aware of different perspectives on how decisions will be made to determine which providers may participate in the program. Based on our history of staying out of these differing provider perspectives, we felt it necessary to weigh in as neutral on the overall bill, but also didn't want to miss an opportunity to urge a permanent codification of this program. The MHIT program has existed for six years as a budget proviso, and its overwhelming success – and growth – prove it is time for the program to be permanently codified. **This is a program that works for Kansas kids.**

Ultimately, we want kids – and their families – to get access to mental health care when they need it and wherever they are at. The MHIT program is showing a way to make this happen. It is rare that a program can point to such strong success, growth, and positive outcomes and lifelong trajectory changes.

We hope that the different perspectives on the details of this bill can be sorted out so that we can get to the goal we all want – **keeping kids healthy, in school, and getting the care they need when they need it, including in crisis situations.**

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me at heather@kac.org.

³ Calvert, J. (2024). *Mental Health Intervention Team Grant, presentation to Robert G. (Bob) Bethell Joint Committee on Home and Community Based Services and KanCare Oversight*. https://kslegislature.org/li/b2023_24/committees/ctte_jt_robert_g_bob_bethell_joint_committee_1/documents/testimony/20240202_18.pdf, Slide 6.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Calvert, J. (2024). *Kansas School Districts Participating in the Mental Health Initiative Team Program School Year 2023-2024*. https://kslegislature.org/li/b2023_24/committees/ctte_jt_robert_g_bob_bethell_joint_committee_1/documents/testimony/20240202_19.pdf