



KANSAS NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION / 715 SW 10TH AVENUE / TOPEKA, KANSAS 66612-1686

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Written Testimony – Proponent
Senate Committee on Education
House Bill 2669
March 19, 2024

Chairperson Baumgardner, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of HB 2669.

Kansas NEA has been a vocal supporter of the health, safety, and welfare of students. We have a strong belief that a healthy school environment positively affects the social/emotional, cognitive, and physical health of children.

Our members have debated and adopted several resolutions that focus on health, safety, and welfare of students. Many of these resolutions encompass mental health components. They include integration of comprehensive school counseling programs that are provided by licensed school counselors. Integrated school social work services that are provided by social workers that are trained in crises intervention, individual and group therapy, and behavior management. Support of special diagnostic services designed for early detection of mental health issues. Our resolutions also strongly support access to school and community health facilities to meet the needs of students, student families, and the communities they reside in.

The nation's youth are facing an unprecedented mental health crisis. In a June 2023 press release, Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City reported that more than 15 million children need mental health services, but only 30-50 percent receive care. This is consistent with what educators are experiencing in the classroom. Our members routinely report that student behavioral challenges in the classroom are on the rise. It would be shortsighted to ignore the impact that mental health has on these incidents.

Our schools need as many tools as possible to address the mental health issues that are affecting our children. HB 2669 will strengthen the mental health intervention team program by codifying it in state statute. Doing so should also create funding consistency for the program as it grows. KNEA believes that the strengthening of this program could be very helpful in providing students with critical mental health services that they deserve.

We ask the committee to approve HB 2669.

Thank you for your time.