

Written PROPONENT testimony for HB 2669 AN ACT Codifying the mental health intervention team program administered by the Kansas department for aging and disability services in state statute.

To: Madam Chair Senator Molly Baumgardner and Senate Education Committee members

From: Kylan Collins; Principal-St. Margaret Mary Catholic School in Wichita, KS

Date: March 18, 2024

Madam Chair Baumgardner and members of the committee,

My name is Kylan Collins, and I am the principal at St. Margaret Mary Catholic School in Wichita, KS. Our enrollment is 228 students with an 87% free and reduced lunch rate with 90% Latino students. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony as a PROPONENT to bill HB 2669.

I moved to St. Margaret Mary Catholic School as a first-year principal back in 2020 in the midst of a pandemic. I was told that I would have a social worker provided through Children First to help with my students. At the time I had very little understanding of what a social worker actually does. This first year was very instrumental in helping students during Covid and giving them an extra person to talk to and trust.

The following year after my social worker left for maternity leave, we were graced with a new social worker who also had a background in counseling. She saw very quickly that the families at our school do not trust social workers or anyone in mental health for fear of what might happen if they get to close. She worked diligently for that entire first year to build relationships with the students and the families to gain trust and to offer services that could help them. It was as simple as providing food and being there when the families and children needed a helping hand.

For two years, my social worker made an impact on our students and our community. She was hired at 32 hours a week and soon found that the needs of the school were not a 9-5 job but required many hours most of the time off the clock. She placed herself in the midst of the students, particularly our 6th-8th grade students who were dealing with the fallout from Covid but also the trauma faced from being from families of poverty.

She made herself available as a social worker, counselor, and another trusted adult in the building that these students could go to about anything without the fear of consequences that they might receive from the principal. She was able to work with students of severe anxiety, eating disorders, drug use, cyberbullying, mental health among other issues facing our students. She was able to build a culture of trust with families that were not willing to seek help when it was most needed. She became someone who we could share ideas with one another and support one another in running a school and helping with factors that affected the lives of the children we serve.

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for allowing me to provide support for HB 2669. Please feel free to reach out to me if I can be of assistance to you in this worthy endeavor to protect our children and provide needed services to them. Thank you for your consideration.

Mr. Kylan Collins
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