

Regarding Bill HB2420:

My name is Theresa M Anderson, LMLP

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Bill HB2420

I am an opponent of the bill.

I have 30 years' experience as a mental health professional and I am currently employed by USD 376 as their mental health interventionalist. I am also a licensed mental health professional employed by the Center for Counseling based in Great Bend Kansas. There is a big difference between the two, one requires parental consent and the other, to be effective, should not.

Requiring verbal and written permission before the early tier 2 level work of school and guidance counselors would significantly and negatively impact the willingness of teens and youth to reach out for help when they need it. It would also potentially escalate students who may have been helped with earlier intervention alone, if they could receive it in a timely, when-they-need-it, manner. I simply cannot imagine what my day would look like if, when a student reaches out to me, I have to send them away until I have contacted their parents and gotten written consent to have a conversation about what is going on. Often, just a listening ear and some simple reminders of coping skills or problem-solving strategies are all they need to go back to class and be successful.

A bill like this undermines those at the state who want to make help for students more available. Those early conversations and time spent building trust, without requiring parent permission, often lead to either resolving the problem or involving the parent in a way the child/teen feels safe and comfortable. Often students are afraid to share their concerns with their parents for fear of upsetting them or appearing weak and talking to a "more objective" party (like a counselor) first seems less threatening. Sometimes the issue actually involves family and they need help knowing how to address that with family.

If early interventions do not work or if screening reveals a greater mental health concern, parents are notified at that point before any ongoing interventions or referrals are made.

I strongly urge you to oppose this bill as it is currently written.

Date of hearing: Jan. 22 at 1:30pm