

Misti Czarnowsky

Licensed School Counselor, and a parent of two (both students at a Kansas public elementary school)

Erie, Kansas

misti.sayge@gmail.com

(620)382-6211

Opponent of HB 2420—*Requiring school districts to obtain parental consent prior to providing certain school-based mental health services to a student.*

Opponent-Written only

Chairperson and Members of the House Committee on Education:

I am writing today to formally oppose HB 2420. While the intent to involve parents in their children's lives is a goal shared by all educators, the specific mandates within this Bill create significant barriers to student safety, undermine professional ethical standards, and jeopardize the mental well-being of Kansas students. I am deeply concerned that this legislation, while likely well-intentioned, would create significant barriers to timely and effective mental health care for students who need it most. Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports are provided to students who are experiencing elevated emotional distress, behavioral challenges, or emerging mental health concerns. Delaying or preventing access to these services can exacerbate problems, increase risk, and ultimately lead to more severe crises.

School counselors and other qualified school mental health professionals are trained to assess student needs, maintain ethical standards, and involve families when it is safe and appropriate to do so. As an elementary school counselor, parent communication is one of my top priorities. Mandating parental consent in all cases fails to account for situations in which students may be reluctant or unable to seek parental involvement due to fear, family conflict, abuse, neglect, or stigma surrounding mental health. For some students, school-based support may be the only safe and trusted access point for help.

As a school counselor, I have personally been in the position of supporting a student who disclosed that they were being abused by a parent or caregiver. In situations like this, a student may finally find the courage to reach out to a trusted adult at school as their first step toward safety. Under this bill, I would be required to tell that student that I cannot speak with them or provide support until I first contact their parents and obtain consent. If the parent responsible for the abuse refuses consent—or if contacting them places the child at further risk—the student is effectively denied help at the moment they most need it. This could be a life threatening turning point in a student's life.

This bill may also have unintended consequences, including discouraging students from seeking help altogether, increasing absenteeism and disciplinary issues, and placing additional strain on already overburdened school systems. Schools should be empowered to respond proactively to student mental health needs, not restricted by policies that prioritize procedural compliance over student well-being.

I strongly support parental involvement in education and mental health whenever possible. However, a blanket requirement for parental consent before providing Tier 2 or Tier 3 support removes professional discretion and undermines evidence-based, multi-tiered systems of support that schools across our state rely on to keep students safe and learning.

I urge you to consider the potential harm this bill could cause to vulnerable students and to oppose its passage. Thank you for your time, your service, and your commitment to the well-being of children and families in our state.

Sincerely,

Misti Czarnowsky, M.S.