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HB 2420 – School-based Mental Health Service to Student

Opponent – Written Only Statement

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Hello. My name is Michael Frint and I am a licensed school counselor, my 15th year with a school counselor license, and a LPC, third year with a LPC license. I currently serve at a middle school as a school counselor in USD 475 – Geary County. I am here representing myself, and not the school district I work for.

I was recently made aware of HB 2420 presented by Representative Steele. While I can appreciate what Representative Steele and her supporters of the bill are trying to accomplish, the manner of helping students or better saying not helping students proposed in this bill is impractical and actually would hurt children. If this committee has reviewed the American School Counselor Association and Kansas Counselor Association standards, you would see school counselors are not here to influence emotions, behavior or social functioning. School counselors are meant to help manage, acquire knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to understand and respect self and others. (Straight from the Kansas school counseling standards.) The words of “influence” is a subjective term, and you would be opening Pandora’s Box with this current bill and tying all educators hands.

If I have an emotionally unregulated or crying child sent to my office and I am unable to reach parents prior to talking to them, the child will continue to be unregulated and unable to devote time to their academics which is their primary function at school. While communication with parents and families is vital, school counselors and educators have been trained with numerous amounts of professional development to assist with mental health needs. The solution based off my reading of this bill, the student will remain unable

to talk to anyone and be in a mental stage where learning will not occur if we are unable to reach parents/guardians. In my 15 years as a school counselor, a 5-10 minute conversation is often enough to regulate the child and return them to classroom. The number of 5-10 minute conversations such as these would go into the high thousands, possibly ten thousand. Assisting the child with getting regulated, thinking through a situation, and finding a way to cope are always my goal

By having an unregulated emotional child remain in class, they often act out and not only impede the learning of themselves but also impact the learning of those around them. I want you to imagine a crying child who cannot be allowed to talk because a parent will not answer the phone. Think of the unintended consequences you are placing on this crying child but also the impact of what is going on in that classroom.

An element missing in this bill is how frequently parents/guardian are unavailable and/or do not answer phones. Some families are at work and have a policy of no phone usage while they are on the clock. Some families do not have voice mail set up, or it is full and you cannot leave messages. Some families flat out will not answer the phone because they do not want to talk to the school. Some families once they have enrolled their child, will not communicate with the school under any circumstance and we have to use law enforcement to get communication. While this example is extreme, children I am talking about attached to these family situations are often the most needy in regards to emotional regulation, behavioral and social functioning.

If you have mental health professionals who are trying to tell children what to do, yes there should be consequences for those individuals but let the school districts, KSDE and other ethical agencies punish them appropriately. HB 2420 ties our hands and will ultimately hurt the individuals this bill is aimed at helping the children. Thank you for your time and consideration of these words. If further testimony is needed, please contact me.