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HB 2420 Requiring Parental Consent for School Based Mental Health Services  
Opponent-Written Only  
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To Whom it May Concern,

During my first year as a mental health care provider in a public school, an 11 year old girl confided in me that her father had been sexually assaulting her on a regular basis since she was 7. What started as uncomfortable touching quickly escalated to rape, all while the student's father warned her that telling anyone would only result in punishment for her. Because of my position at the time, I was able to build rapport and create an environment where she felt safe enough to disclose years of sexual abuse for the first time in her life. After doing my due diligence as a mandated reporter, DCF immediately removed the student from the home, the father was arrested, and my student was finally able to escape the looming threat of her father and start to heal from years of trauma.

As uncomfortable as that story was to read, it is in no way unique to what I and every other school counselor in Kansas experience throughout our careers. Working at a high risk school, I can generally count on submitting at least two reports of abuse or neglect to DCF every month. Of those reports, I can only recall one that wasn't picked up for further investigation. Many of those students told me they had been coached by their abusers (usually parents) not to speak to other adults about these incidents.

To put it as bluntly as possible, if this legislation passes, children are going to die. Every year, school counselors literally save countless lives by providing students with a safe space to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. When a student voices thoughts of suicide or self harm at school, counselors are the first responders who conduct risk assessments, contact parents, and refer to outside supports for students AND their families. When a student chronically complains of hunger, we connect families to valuable resources that help put food on their tables. When children are in danger, we protect them. And when parents disallow their students to communicate with school based mental health supports, that life-saving connection is brutally severed.

When I think about the kind of parent who would deny their child the opportunity to speak to a school counselor, the alarm bells in my brain that have been informed by years of experience, research, and training immediately start ringing. This proposed legislation begs the question: what are the adults who wrote this bill trying to hide? What secrets are they trying to protect? Why do they value their own privacy above the safety of children?

I'm not going to waste your time with statistics. I don't need numbers to show me the importance of the work I do as a school counselor, and grown adults who claim to have the best interests of the children of Kansas in mind shouldn't either. I guarantee that, if you were to cold call any public school counselor in ANY state and ask for an example of a time a student who had been coached by their parents not to talk to them had disclosed abuse or suicidal ideation, they would struggle to choose just one. This is the job, and it has to be done regardless of parents' feelings.

I would be doing a disservice to myself and every other school counselor in the state of Kansas if I didn't tell you now, in plain language, that there will be blood on the hands of every single legislator who votes in favor of this bill. As much as I hate to beg, I am pleading here and now for the safety of my

students and every other child in this great state. I am begging you, with everything I have in me, to do right by these children.

Sincerely,

Emily Hopkins, LSC

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