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HB 2420 – Requiring parental consent for all school-based mental health services
Opponent- Written only
Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026

To: Chair Estes and Members of the House Education Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to HB 2420. My name is Jina Kugler, a licensed school counselor and Graduate Coach with Greenbush Virtual Academy #609, serving students in more than 60 districts across Kansas. This is my 30th year in education. I am deeply concerned that HB 2420 would unintentionally limit students' access to timely, preventive mental health support.

School counselors are often the first adults to recognize when a student is struggling. Much of our work involves meeting with students multiple times to build trust, establish rapport, and teach coping and problem-solving skills. These brief, preventive interactions, not clinical therapy, help students manage stress, regulate emotions, and stay engaged in learning. Effective early intervention depends on students feeling safe enough to return, which requires flexibility and responsiveness in the moment.

In my current virtual role, most of my interaction with students is in a one-on-one setting, which could be considered Tier 2 support. If a student discloses stress, family or peer conflict, or other concerns during a call or zoom meeting, immediate support is needed. Waiting for consent, especially when a student may not stay on the line, could have serious consequences and prevent a student from reaching out in the future.

Requiring written parental consent before any mental-health-related support, even a simple check-in or de-escalation, creates delays that can put students at risk. Many families face barriers such as demanding work schedules, limited communication access, or language differences. A large portion of my students are in the KCK district and speak Spanish. They are often the translators for their parents or we have to connect with an outside translation service, causing more delays as well as violating student privacy.

This bill could also prevent services for students in unsafe homes, for whom parental consent is a barrier, not a protection. Throughout my career, I have found that despite student concerns about sharing their personal struggles with parents, most parents are very supportive. However, that is not always the case. One specific student comes to mind. Her mother consistently verbally and emotionally abused her and was also of the mindset that you do not share anything outside of the family. When the student was hospitalized with suicidal ideation I was in the room and witnessed the parent's arrival and her first statement was "Well, you are not bleeding to

death so what are we doing here?” I continued to provide support for this student until her graduation. If parental consent had been required, I would not have been able to support this student despite her willingness to seek me out.

This bill may also perpetuate mental health stigma by signaling that seeking help requires permission or risks exposing private struggles. Students who fear this will simply stop reaching out. It takes a great amount of courage for a student to ask an adult for help. The last thing we want to do is shut them down. Over the past several years, schools across Kansas have worked intentionally to reduce the stigma around seeking mental health support. Counselors have invested time in normalizing help-seeking behaviors, teaching students that reaching out is a sign of strength, not weakness. Policies that create new barriers risk undoing this progress by making students feel that asking for help is something that requires permission or could get an adult in trouble. When students sense hesitation from counselors, because of fear of fines or procedural delays, they may interpret that as a sign that their struggles are not appropriate to talk about, reinforcing the very stigma we have worked so hard to dismantle.

Kansas school counselors already follow strict ethical standards requiring parental involvement when appropriate. What we need is the ability to respond when a student asks for help, not policies that delay support or jeopardize safety. Often, the mental health support counselors provide is simply helping students navigate developmentally appropriate struggles—managing friendships, handling academic stress, or learning basic emotional regulation. Under HB 2420, counselors may hesitate to offer even these brief, everyday interventions for fear of being fined, despite their importance in keeping students grounded and ready to learn. Requiring a phone call to obtain permission for each interaction also removes valuable time from an already overextended day; many school counselors carry caseloads of 350–500 students, making these added steps unrealistic and detrimental to timely support.

I respectfully urge the committee to reject HB 2420 in its current form and collaborate with school mental health professionals to craft policy that supports both parental involvement and timely access to care.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to Kansas students.

Sincerely,
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