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

Opponent - Written Only

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Chairperson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Derek Thompson, and I am a high school counselor serving students in the state of Kansas. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 2420.

As school counselors, we are bound by both state law and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Ethical Standards. These standards emphasize a careful and deliberate balance: honoring the legal rights of parents while also protecting a student's right to a safe, confidential space for support, growth, and early intervention. HB 2420 threatens to disrupt this balance by requiring written parental consent before school counselors can provide Tier 2 or Tier 3 mental health support, even prior to having clarifying or exploratory conversations with students.

Research consistently shows that in states with mandatory parental consent laws for school-based mental health services, there is a significant decrease in the number of students who seek and receive help for mental health concerns. Adolescents are far less likely to ask for support when they fear that doing so will immediately trigger parental notification, regardless of context or severity. This bill risks silencing the very students who most need help.

By adding a bureaucratic layer of verbal and written notification for "any intervention designed to influence emotional, behavioral, or social functioning," HB 2420 creates barriers during a critical window of prevention. Many of the most effective school-based mental health interventions occur early when an issue is emerging and most responsive to support. Requiring formal consent before providing even basic Tier 2 support risks turning students away before problems escalate into crises.

From a practical standpoint, this legislation would significantly impair our ability to do our jobs effectively. If counselors are required to call parents and obtain written consent every time a student needs support beyond Tier 1, we will lose valuable time and capacity. School counselors already manage large caseloads and complex responsibilities. This bill would divert our efforts away from students and toward paperwork, delays, and missed opportunities for timely care.

There are also serious safety concerns to consider. Without the ability to have an initial, clarifying conversation with a trusted school professional, some students may retreat entirely, allowing anxiety, depression, trauma, or suicidal ideation to worsen unnoticed. In particularly concerning scenarios, a student may disclose abuse, neglect, or trauma occurring at home. Requiring educators to first contact parents before engaging in meaningful conversation could place that student in immediate danger. Additionally, students may simply stop approaching school counselors, teachers, or other trusted adults if they know those adults are legally required to call home before listening.

It is important to be clear: educators and school mental health professionals want to partner with families. We deeply value transparency and recognize parents as the primary guides in their children's lives. In practice, counselors regularly involve parents when concerns rise to a level that warrants ongoing intervention, referral, or safety planning. However, effective partnerships are built on trust and professional judgment, not rigid mandates that remove discretion and nuance from complex human situations.

HB 2420, while likely well-intentioned, would have the unintended consequence of reducing access to mental health support, increasing risk for vulnerable students, and undermining the trust that allows school counselors to serve as a first line of prevention. I respectfully urge the committee to oppose this bill and to protect the ability of Kansas schools to respond promptly, ethically, and safely to students in need.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Derek Thompson  
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