

**Testimony by Tim DeWeese, Director of Johnson County Mental Health Center,
to the House Committee on Federal and State Affairs in support of House Bill 2379**

Requiring the Kansas Bureau of Investigation to establish a Kansas voluntary do-not-sell firearms list to prevent the purchase of firearms by any person who voluntarily registers to be placed on the list.

March 13, 2025

Chairman Kessler and members of the committee, my name is Tim DeWeese, and I serve as the director of Johnson County Mental Health Center. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today in **support** of HB 2379.

Johnson County Mental Health Center began operating in 1962, initially providing outpatient services with four employees in one location. Today, we have over 500 employees in five locations throughout Johnson County delivering community-based mental health and substance use treatment services to tens-of-thousands of residents annually. We are a department of Johnson County Government, licensed by the State of Kansas as a Community Mental Health Center (CMHC), accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) International and certified as a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) by the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS).

Firearms are the most commonly used and deadliest method of suicide in our communities. They account for 59% of all suicide deaths in Kansas and 50% of all suicide deaths in Johnson County — more than any other method. The percentage is even higher among Veterans, as 77% of Veterans who die by suicide in Kansas use a firearm. Tragically, as many as nine out of 10 suicide attempts involving a firearm result in death.

Suicide attempts can also be quick and impulsive, with about half occurring within 10 minutes of a suicidal thought. Any tool that helps a person plan for their safety in advance and creates time and space between them and lethal means, such as the proposed voluntary do-not-sell firearms list, will save lives.

To reduce the risk of suicide for our clients and community members, Johnson County Mental Health Center emphasizes safety planning and lethal means safety. Safety planning involves creating a list of strategies, supports, and resources that is written down and planned out in advance to be ready and keep a person safe when they experience a mental health crisis. Lethal means safety involves taking intentional steps, like using gun locks or safe storage options, to reduce a person's access to lethal means, putting time and space between a person experiencing a mental health crisis and the things they could use to harm themselves, like a firearm.

Safety planning and lethal means safety are effective, evidence-based approaches to suicide prevention, and both would be bolstered by the creation of a voluntary do-not-sell firearms list that would be another tool a person could use to plan for their or their loved ones' safety if they experience a mental health crisis or suicidal ideation.

Johnson County Mental Health Center has also been reaching out to gun retailers, ranges, and owners through our *Secure and Protect Initiative*. We know many gun owners may not seek help or appropriate resources during mental health struggles because of stigma or misconceptions about mental health and firearm ownership, so we are proactively building relationships and connecting with the firearm community to provide educational resources, training opportunities, and responsible storage solutions to reduce firearm-related crises in Johnson County. Creation of this list would give us and our partners another safety option to include in our education and training efforts.

Because a voluntary do-not-sell firearms list would give individuals and families another tool to voluntarily plan for safety before a mental health crisis occurs, we support HB 2379 and ask the members of the committee to recommend its passage.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out.