



Mental Health

Testimony by Nathan Carter, Community Relations Manager at Johnson County Mental Health Center, to the House Committee on Federal and State Affairs in support of House Bill 2501

Providing for immunity from civil liability to federal firearms licensees for returning a firearm to the firearm owner at the termination of a firearm hold agreement

Thursday, Jan. 29, 2026

Chairman Kessler and members of the committee, my name is Nathan Carter, and I serve as the Community Relations Manager for Johnson County Mental Health Center. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today in **support** of HB 2501.

About Johnson County Mental Health Center

Johnson County Mental Health Center began operating in 1962, providing outpatient services with four employees in one location. Today, we have over 500 employees in seven locations throughout Johnson County delivering community-based behavioral health 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).

Secure and Protect Initiative

In 2023, Johnson County Mental Health Center launched the Secure and Protect Initiative, a suicide prevention effort that promotes responsible firearm ownership and mental health awareness among firearm owners in Johnson County. Our prevention team has spent the past three years building relationships with local firearm retailers and providing them with training, resources and safe storage options, including free gun safes through KDADS' Kansas Community Suicide Prevention Grant.

50% of all deaths by suicide in Johnson County involve a firearm. Across Kansas, that number jumps to 59%. Firearms are also involved in 77% of all suicide deaths among veterans in Kansas. Research shows the time between someone thinking about suicide and attempting suicide can be as short as five to 10 minutes. Putting time and distance between a person experiencing a mental health crisis and their firearms can make a life-saving difference.

However, many firearms owners are hesitant to seek support during mental health struggles because they fear losing their firearms, which is why our Secure and Protect Initiative has focused on meeting firearm owners where they are in our community and providing them with a variety of responsible firearm storage options, such as gun locks, gun safes and out-of-home firearm storage. Those options create that critical time and distance that gives a person a chance to survive and connect to the support they need and deserve.



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Partnership with The Armory Project (TAP)

The latest step in this effort has been partnering with The Armory Project (TAP). TAP partners with Federal Firearms License (FFL) holders to provide voluntary, temporary firearm storage to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. Establishing TAP locations at local gun stores offers a trusted, professional option for firearm owners that honors their personal choice and upholds their Second Amendment rights.

To date, two gun stores in Johnson County have agreed to be TAP locations: Up in Arms Kansas in De Soto and Penguin Pawn in Overland Park. Recently, Up in Arms Kansas stored the first firearms in Kansas through TAP. JCMHC was able to connect the store's owner, Ryq Farnow, with a family who had safety concerns related to mental health and access to firearms. The family was unsure how to safely handle and transport the firearms, so the store walked them through the process and provided basic firearm safety guidance. The store is currently storing 10 firearms for the family for 60 days, helping them protect their family during a vulnerable time.

Other gun stores in Johnson County have expressed interest in becoming TAP locations, but liability concerns are a barrier to their participation. This bill would remove those concerns, allow more firearm retailers to participate and help organizations like JCMHC and TAP expand access to voluntary, responsible firearm storage across Johnson County and Kansas. Similar legislation in Louisiana helped TAP participation grow by over 30 new retailers. In all, TAP is now active in five states and, through local firearm retailers in those states, has helped responsibly store over 1,000 firearms for people in crisis.

Support for HB 2501

As we continue working to reduce the number of deaths by suicide in our community, Johnson County Mental Health Center supports HB 2501 and asks 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 additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out to JCMHC.