



Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc.

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Testimony to House Fed and State Affairs HB 2501

January 29, 2026

Chair Kessler and members of the Committee, my name is Michelle Ponce. I am the Associate Director for the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc. The Association represents the 25 licensed Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in Kansas that provide behavioral health services in all 105 counties, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. In Kansas, CMHCs are the local Mental Health Authorities coordinating the delivery of publicly funded community-based mental health services. As part of licensing regulations, CMHCs are required to provide services to all Kansans needing them, regardless of their ability to pay. This makes the community mental health system the “safety net” for Kansans with behavioral health needs.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2501.

The rate of death by suicide in Kansas continues to be of grave concern. In 2024, 516 Kansans died by suicide¹, making suicide the second leading cause of death for ages 15-44 (second to unintentional injuries, such as auto accidents) and the leading cause of death for ages 5-14². The good news is that the overall incidence is down from a high of 590 in 2022. Between 2011 and 2024, 4,006 deaths by suicide were caused by firearms, and firearms continue to be the number one leading mechanism of suicide.³

We believe strongly that prevention is key component of the behavioral health strategy for our state to reduce the incidence of death by suicide, and that includes efforts to develop proactive safety plans.

HB 2501 helps prevent firearm suicides by allowing individuals to voluntarily choose to safely store firearms out of their own homes with a trusted federal firearms licensee (FFL). Further, the

¹ <https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/1974/Suicide-Related-Data>

² Kansas Department of Health and Environment. (2025). *Annual summary of vital statistics, 2024*. <https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/DocumentCenter/View/53419/Kansas-Annual-Summary-of-Vital-Statistics-2024-PDF>

³ <https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/1974/Suicide-Related-Data>

bill provides immunity from civil liability for the FFL upon returning the firearm to the owner upon completion of the agreed-upon term of the hold agreement, thereby removing barriers for the FFL to enter into the voluntary hold agreement.

This is a common-sense approach to prevention that empowers individuals to voluntarily take safety measures to prevent injury or death by firearm.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2501, and I will stand for questions at the appropriate time.