



We're Here for You

For 24 Hour Emergency Services
Phone: 1-800-432-0333 or (785) 628-2871

A Licensed Community Mental Health Center
www.hpmhc.com

Testimony in Support of HB 2236
House Health and Human Services Committee
March 4, 2025

Chairman Carpenter, Vice Chair Bryce, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2236, which would establish the Mental Health Intervention Team (MHIT) program as a permanent initiative. My name is Craig Poe, and I serve as the CEO of High Plains Mental Health Center, a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) serving northwest Kansas.

The MHIT program has transformed how youth access mental health care in our region by embedding mental health professionals directly in schools. This model removes barriers to care, reduces stigma, and ensures students receive timely access to services—especially in rural areas where providers are few and transportation can be a significant obstacle. However, lack of reliable transportation is not always the primary issue for families. Many students did not receive services prior to the MHIT model because their parents simply did not have the time to take off work, pick up their child, drive to appointments, and return them to school. This program allows children to receive the help they need without creating additional burdens on already stretched families.

At High Plains Mental Health Center, we are proud to provide school-based services to 41 public school districts, five private schools, and 96 school buildings across northwest Kansas. In the past year alone, we served 1,324 clients under the age of 19, with 1,069 of those attending public or private schools. Currently, 335 students receive therapy services directly at school—a model that removes logistical barriers and increases the likelihood that students will engage in and complete treatment.

The MHIT program's impact is not just measured in numbers—it's measured in lives changed:

- One student was referred after experiencing panic attacks during class presentations. With ongoing therapy at school, she has significantly improved her anxiety symptoms and gained confidence in public speaking.
- Another student, who was failing most classes and struggling with depression, has since improved academically, rejoined extracurricular activities, and secured a part-time job—all with the help of weekly therapy sessions at school.
- An elementary student who once refused to come to school now attends happily every day and looks forward to seeing her therapist.

The MHIT model has even opened new ways to engage families in care. In one case, a father joined a family therapy session from his tractor, the mother participated on her lunch break from her vehicle, and the child attended from school—all through virtual services. While this kind of innovative care is possible with existing technology, the MHIT model has made it a reality by embedding services directly in schools and facilitating stronger connections between families and providers.

The success of the MHIT program highlights that every dollar invested in school-based mental health services provides tangible benefits for youth, families, and communities. Early intervention reduces the likelihood of more costly crisis services, hospitalizations, and long-term system involvement. With only one school dropout reported among all students in our MHIT services, the program is making a clear difference in keeping students engaged in school and on the path to graduation.

While we are actively partnering with new schools and exploring ways to grow our efforts, the current uncertainty of year-to-year funding limits our ability to plan for long-term expansion. Permanent funding at the current level would

Serving the People of Northwest Kansas

Hays	Colby	Goodland	Norton	Phillipsburg	Osborne
208 E. 7th 785-628-2871	750 S. Range 785-462-6774	723 Main St. 785-899-5991	211 S. Norton 785-877-5141	783 7th St. 785-543-5284	209 W. Harrison 785-346-2184



We're Here for You

For 24 Hour Emergency Services
Phone: 1-800-432-0333 or (785) 628-2871

A Licensed Community Mental Health Center
www.hpmhc.com

allow us to expand services to additional schools, strengthen partnerships, and serve more students who desperately need mental health support.

Kansas has made tremendous progress by launching the MHIT program. Now is the time to solidify that investment and make this life-changing program a permanent part of our state's commitment to youth mental health.

On behalf of the students, families, and communities we serve, I respectfully urge the committee to support HB 2236 and help secure a brighter future for Kansas youth.

Sincerely,
Craig Poe
CEO, High Plains Mental Health Center

Serving the People of Northwest Kansas

Hays 208 E. 7th 785-628-2871	Colby 750 S. Range 785-462-6774	Goodland 723 Main St. 785-899-5991	Norton 211 S. Norton 785-877-5141	Phillipsburg 783 7th St. 785-543-5284	Osborne 209 W. Harrison 785-346-2184
---	--	---	--	--	---