

Testimony of Zoe Greenemeyer
School Counselor, St. Mary's Grade School, Salina
Before the House Health and Human Services Committee
March 4, 2025

Chair Carpenter and Members of the House Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Zoe Greenemeyer, and I am the school counselor at St. Mary's Grade School in Salina. Every day, I have the privilege of working with young students who face challenges no child should have to navigate alone. I am here to express my strong support for HB 2236 because I have witnessed firsthand the positive impact that school-based mental health services have on the lives of our youngest learners.

At St. Mary's, we serve 279 students. Of those, 9 are currently benefiting from this grant, but we also have 20 students on our waiting list, underscoring the need for expanded mental health services. Feedback from families and students served has been positive.

We are fortunate to have established strong partnerships with Central Kansas Mental Health Center and two local therapists who provide case management and therapy services during the school day. This collaboration is crucial because, for many of our students, school is the safest and most stable part of their day. Our students often bring emotional burdens to the classroom—worries about depression, family struggles, anxiety, and trauma—that extend far beyond their academic needs.

This grant ensures that families—particularly working families—have access to the mental health support they need without disrupting their work schedules or requiring them to take time off for outside appointments. For families juggling multiple responsibilities, receiving mental health services during the school day is invaluable. It allows parents to maintain their employment while ensuring their child's well-being, which in turn strengthens the stability of the home environment. This grant provides mental health services at no cost to families, thus providing access to mental health services regardless of financial circumstances.

Through the Mental Health Intervention Team (MHIT) program, we are able to provide students with professional support right where they need it most—at school. This service allows students to stay engaged in their learning while receiving the mental health care they require. When a child in crisis can meet with a therapist during the school day, rather than waiting weeks for an appointment, it can be the difference between feeling hopeless and feeling heard. This timely support minimizes the negative impact on their school attendance and academic success.

Additionally, the grant helps to coordinate care among various providers, ensuring that all professionals involved in a child's well-being are aligned. By working together—therapists, school staff, and families—we are able to create a comprehensive plan for each child's success. This holistic approach ensures that students' mental health needs are addressed alongside their academic needs.

While our teachers and staff care deeply for our students, they are not trained mental health professionals. Without programs like MHIT, many children would go without the help they need simply because their families are unable to access or afford consistent mental health care. This program is not just a resource; it is a lifeline for the children we serve.

HB 2236 will ensure that students across Kansas continue to have access to essential mental health services within their schools. I urge you to pass this bill and provide our children with the support they need to succeed, both academically and in life.

Thank you for your time and for your ongoing commitment to the children of Kansas.