

Testimony of Jennifer Kay-Higgins
Parent, 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 this opportunity to speak with you today. As an educator, I witness the need for mental health services in our schools every day, but today I am here to speak about my experience with my own daughter. My name is Jennifer Kay-Higgins, and I am the mother of a 6th grade student at St. Mary's Grade School in Salina. I am here to express my strong support for HB 2236 because I have personally witnessed the impact of school-based mental health services not only for my child, but for my students as well.

My daughter has dealt with anxiety most of her life and we recently found a therapist who she connected with immediately. My daughter had attended sessions for a few months when her therapist told us that she would be able to offer therapy at school thanks to a grant awarded to Salina Catholic Schools. This was a great relief for us financially since our insurance does not cover therapy. We were also comforted by knowing our daughter would not have to miss school and we would not have to miss work due to appointments since her appointments would be on site. This is a reality that many families face: financial barriers, busy work schedules, absences from school, and lack of understanding on how to access mental health services. By having these resources available in our schools, we are ensuring that every child—regardless of their background—has the support they need to succeed emotionally, socially, and academically.

As parents, my husband and I do our best to support our daughter in all ways. This opportunity has given us great comfort in knowing her needs are being met. HB 2236 would allow our daughter and others to receive the services they need as they learn how to manage their mental health issues. The communication between the school and mental health services also benefit the students greatly. Like my daughter, so many school-aged children today struggle with anxiety, self-doubt, and the pressures of growing up in an increasingly complex world. Knowing that my daughter has access to professional support within her school has been an absolute blessing for our family and I want the same opportunity for all Kansas children.

Through the Mental Health Team (MHIT) program, my daughter has been able to meet with a counselor every other week during the school day—someone who understands what she is going through and can give her the tools to manage her anxiety in a healthy way. This program has given her confidence, helped her navigate friendships, and provided her with a sense of security that she carries with her every day. Without MHIT, I fear that many students, including my own daughter, will struggle in silence, unsure of where to turn.

HB 2236 is not just about mental health services; it is about giving parents peace of mind, giving teachers the support they need, and most importantly, giving our children the opportunity to thrive. I urge you to pass this bill so that families like mine, and so many others across Kansas, can continue to rely on the invaluable support this program provides.

Thank you for your time and your dedication to the well-being of our children, who are the future of Kansas.