

Testimony of Geoff Andrews

Superintendent of Catholic Schools, Diocese of 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 before you today. My name is Geoff Andrews, and I serve as the Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Salina, which spans 26,000 square miles across north-central and northwest Kansas. I am here today as a proponent of HB 2236 because I have seen firsthand the profound impact that mental health support can have on our students, their families, and our rural communities.

Our Catholic schools serve as centers of faith and learning, but they also serve as places of refuge and support for children struggling with mental health challenges. In our diocese, where small towns are separated by great distances, families often face overwhelming barriers to accessing mental health services. Many of our parents are farmers, ranchers, or small business owners who struggle to find nearby mental health resources for their children. It is difficult for families to attend appointments due to scheduling conflicts, long distances, and students' extracurricular activities, making it even harder to access consistent care.

Currently, seven of our Catholic schools utilize the Mental Health Intervention Team (MHIT) program, and we plan to have more apply next year. We see daily the struggles our students face—anxiety, depression, and trauma that our teachers are not fully equipped to handle on their own. By partnering with our local mental health agencies, High Plains Mental Health in Rooks and Ellis counties and Central Kansas Mental Health in Dickinson and Saline counties, as well as two private therapists, we have been able to provide much-needed support that has helped immensely.

The Mental Health Intervention Team (MHIT) program bridges this gap. It brings essential mental health professionals into our schools, ensuring that our students receive the care they desperately need without the barriers of distance or access. When schools and mental health professionals work together, lives are changed—lives are saved.

HB 2236 is not just policy; it is a lifeline. It is hope for a student who feels alone. It is peace of mind for a parent who fears for their child. It is the support that our rural communities need to thrive.

I urge you to pass this bill and continue investing in the mental well-being of the children and families of Kansas. Thank you for your time and your commitment to this critical issue.