



**Proponent Testimony on HB 2236 – Oral, In-Person  
House Health and Human Services Committee  
March 4, 2025**

Chair Carpenter, Vice Chair Bryce, Ranking Member Ruiz, and Members of the Committee, my name is Kristalle Hedrick, CEO of the Children's Alliance of Kansas. The Alliance is an association of 18 private, non-profit child welfare agencies that collectively provide a full array of services for children and families in child abuse and neglect prevention, family preservation, foster care, adoption, independent living, and parent, youth, and child skill-building, mental health, and substance use treatment. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2236.

HB 2236 seeks to establish a structured funding mechanism for mental health intervention teams in school districts, addressing the growing concern over child and youth mental health and well-being. There are both economic and social benefits to the implementation of more concentrated mental health services in schools.

Over the last decade, families in Kansas have experienced fluctuations in their ability to access mental health services. From 2008 to 2010, the state reduced mental health funding by \$19 million<sup>1</sup>. In 2016, a 4% reduction in Medicaid spending resulted in a combined annual loss of \$30 million for community mental health centers<sup>2</sup>.

Nationwide, between February 2017 and February 2019, as many as 25,000 children entered foster care as a result of their caregivers relinquishing custody in hopes of their child receiving adequate mental and behavioral healthcare; others relinquished because they feared their child is a danger to themselves or others in the home and they have exhausted all options to keep their family safe.<sup>3</sup>

Reductions in mental health funding have significantly impacted children, particularly those in the foster care system. In 2018, a class-action lawsuit was filed against the state of Kansas on behalf of children in foster care. The lawsuit alleged the state was failing to provide adequate mental health services to children in foster care. A settlement agreement was reached in 2020, in which Kansas was ordered to pay approximately \$2.3 million in attorney fees and expenses to the organizations that initiated the lawsuit.<sup>4</sup> Beyond legal fees, the state has incurred additional expenses related to the mandated reforms included in the settlement agreement. While exact figures are difficult to determine, Kansas has allocated substantial resources to comply with the terms of the settlement. Despite these efforts, the third and most recent audit revealed that only 52% of children in foster care receive timely mental health services.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nami.org/wp-content/uploads/NAMISateBudgetCrisis2011.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www2.ljworld.com/news/2016/jul/06/kansas-mental-heath-centers-cutting-back-after-los/> stability and

<sup>3</sup> <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/custody-relinquishment-prevalence>

<sup>4</sup> <https://kansasreflector.com/2021/08/20/judge-orders-kansas-to-pay-nearly-2-3-million-in-legal-fees-and-expenses-in-child-welfare-lawsuit/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/McIntyre-v.-Howard-Period-3-Report.pdf>

Following the pandemic, states across the country are seeing families struggling to meet the mental and behavioral health needs of children. Community partnerships can help K-12 schools provide more robust mental health support for students. Integrating mental health services within schools has become a pivotal strategy to support student well-being and academic success. Nine states have enacted laws mandating the inclusion of mental health education within school curricula.<sup>6</sup> These mandates not only focus on integrating education about the importance of mental health and well-being but also direct services supporting and families and individuals beyond the educational environment.<sup>7</sup>

The Children's Alliance of Kansas believes HB 2236 will

- Promote mental health and academic success of students across the state.
- Offer crucial early education about the importance of mental health care for youth and their caregivers.
- Reduce spending on crisis-driven services such as juvenile corrections, inpatient mental health treatment, and foster care.
- Foster emotional well-being, reduce stigma, and equip young people with the tools and skills they need to navigate challenges throughout their lives.

The Mental Health Intervention Team (MHIT) has been operational and funded since its inception in the 2018-2019 school year. We ask that you support HB 2236 to formalize the structure of this existing program and ensure sustained support and integration within Kansas's family and child well-being framework.

Kristalle Hedrick  
[khedrick@childdally.org](mailto:khedrick@childdally.org)  
785.764.7465

**Members of the Children's Alliance of Kansas:**

CALM, Emporia  
Cornerstones of Care, Kansas City  
DCCCA, Lawrence  
Eckerd Connects, Wichita  
EmberHope, Wichita  
Florence Crittenton, Topeka  
FosterAdopt Connect, Kansas City  
Kansas Children's Service League, Topeka  
KidsTLC, Olathe

KVC Kansas, Olathe  
O'Connell Children's Shelter, Lawrence  
Rainbows United, Wichita  
Restoration Family Services, Wichita  
Saint Francis Ministries, Salina  
TFI Family Services, Topeka  
The Villages, Topeka  
Wichita Children's Home, Wichita  
Zoe's House, Kansas City

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://edgate.com/blog/more-states-make-mental-health-mandatory>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/student-mental-health-emerges-as-focus-of-education-bills-in-2022>