



Testimony to Senate Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice on Senate Bill 367

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Mister Chair and members of the Committee, my name is Kyle Kessler, I am the Executive Director for the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas, Inc. The Association appreciates the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of Senate Bill 367, which deals with amendments to the juvenile justice system.

The Association represents the 26 licensed Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) in Kansas that provide behavioral health services in all 105 counties, 24-hours a day, seven days a week. In Kansas, CMHCs are the local Mental Health Authorities coordinating the delivery of publicly funded community-based mental health services. As part of licensing regulations, CMHCs are required to provide services to all Kansans needing them, regardless of their ability to pay. This makes the community mental health system the “safety net” for Kansans with mental health needs, collectively serving over 127,000 Kansans.

We applaud the work that has been done to date on reforming the juvenile justice system. Using data-driven, research-based principles can help strengthen the system and improve outcomes for children and families while continuing to protect public safety.

As we think about what reform efforts might look like, there are a few key values that we believe the committee should keep in mind:

- Preventing deeper juvenile justice system involvement;
- Increasing the availability of community-based programs;
- Support initiatives through oversight and reinvestment.

As the local Mental Health Authorities for community-based mental health services in Kansas, CMHCs provide the primary linkages between and among service agencies as well as transitioning patients from child to adult services. The primary goal of CMHCs is to provide quality care, treatment, and rehabilitation to individuals through mental health and substance use disorder programs in the least restrictive environment. The CMHCs strongly endorse treatment at the community level in order to allow individuals to keep functioning in their own homes and communities.

We would ask the committee to consider how CMHCs might be able to fit into juvenile justice reform efforts. We believe that our statewide network and ability to treat juveniles in the community can be an asset moving forward with reform. While we do not have a specific proposal to bring before you today, our message is that we would like to be at the table when the details are worked out. We believe that we can be helpful in this process and we look forward to working with stakeholders when the time comes.

The Association appreciates this committee taking a look at this very important issue. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.