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ROBYN ESSEX

DISTRICT 78

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of HB2613. I represent District 78 which is southern Olathe. My husband has been a school teacher in the Blue Valley School District for over 30 years. He shared not long ago about how he used to teach "Project Alert" which is a drug education program currently being used that is geared toward middle school aged students. The program had been moved around to various teachers/counselors because no one really had the time to fit it into their curriculum. The result was intermittent and abbreviated lessons that occurred inconsistently from school to school with some rarely having these types of lessons at all. I have spoken with SRO's, school counselors, school psychologists, and teachers about this problem. They all agree, what is being provided isn't enough. The fentanyl crisis has exploded. The most recent case being 3 Chief's fans found in a back yard after a watch party. According to our KBI Director, since 2018, fentanyl has killed more than 850 people in the Kansas City area. This count took place several month ago. In Johnson County there were 149 fentanyl deaths from 2018-2022. In Olathe alone, that number was 42. The numbers are much higher when you consider cases where Narcan was given on the scene that saved lives. This is in addition to other popular drugs on the rise such as marijuana and vaping that is causing a host of health issues in our youth. Combatting this starts with education. Consistent, carefully crafted education that has input from law enforcement, educators, and others to give our students the tools to recognize and understand the threat that is facing them today. D.A.R.E. is a drug education program that has been around for decades. It is a comprehensive program that will be updated to include the latest threats that our kids are facing.

I am going to touch briefly on the funding piece because we have testimony coming from the AG's office and also someone here from the Kansas Fights Addiction Board to discuss those details further. Currently we have a .5 FTE in AG's office dedicated to D.A.R.E. and our drug education across the state. That is not enough. This bill will provide 2 FTE's, one that serve as the coordinator of the program and one an educator. That educator will travel to the schools that are requesting this resource and train SRO's and others on this new program. This is not a mandate. This is another resource that if schools choose to adopt this program, it will be available for them. This bill also establishes the drug abuse resistance education fund.

I am excited to see so many proponents today including PTO's, the Olathe School District, Law Enforcement, School Counselors, and parents who have reached out to me in strong support of this bill. I believe this is the answer to provide consistent, accurate, and up to date drug prevention programs to our school districts.

Thank you!

Robyn Essex