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Testimony to Senate Public Health and Welfare on HB 2578

Thank you, Chairwoman Gossage, and members of the committee, for allowing me to testify here before you today in support of HB 2578. My name is Joan Tammany, and I am the Executive Director of COMCARE, the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) and Community Mental Health Center (CMHC) in Sedgwick County. This year COMCARE celebrates 64 years of providing behavioral health services to our community and the landscape has changed significantly in those 60 plus years. COMCARE serves between 12,000 and 15,000 individuals a year, is a 988-lifeline center and has a large crisis center serving our area. We have a long history of serving the most vulnerable and complex members of our community and are the financial safety net in Sedgwick County.

I had the pleasure of testifying before the legislature in 2021 on behalf of legislation to support the implementation of the CCBHC's model of care and through the hard work of this committee and the full legislature that model of care became a reality in Kansas. A reality that was both aspirational and transformative. It was the life preserver the CMHC system in Kansas needed to be revived as it redefined the payment structure needed to scale up a robust system of care once again in Kansas. The work this committee membership and many others did to pass CCBHC legislation served to provide hope and healing for so many citizens of our communities. A sincere thank you as it has allowed us to increase access and capacity, implement evidence-based practices and fill gaps in our communities.

COMCARE became provisionally certified as a CCBHC in May 2021. We embraced that journey knowing that it would take time and tremendous effort and focus to scale up and meet certification criteria. However, we already had the foundation and history of providing community based behavioral health services. Unlike other provider types, we understood the array of services required of a CCBHC, knew the direction we were moving to really demonstrate our success as a CCBHC and had already begun the work with community partners including law enforcement to define growth opportunities. Today we are fully certified and continue to grow our presence as a CCBHC in our community.

This success would not have been possible without the added resources provided through this model of excellence. For COMCARE workforce strength was the largest obstacle to overcome. At the time we became provisionally certified my workforce strength was a mere 59% meaning 41% of my positions were vacant. COVID and poor pay played havoc on my ability to retain and attract talent. In August 2021, knowing we were provisionally certified we implemented sign-on bonuses which allowed us to climb to a workforce strength of 69%. It was not until I was able to take a calculated risk and significantly raise salaries in September 2022 that COMCARE saw the real return on investment. Today we are at 87% workforce strength and growing.



COMCARE - CERTIFIED COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLINIC

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But that is not the only area of growth and opportunity.

- The number of intakes completed has increased by 18% over the last year.
- Wait time for services has decreased by days and sometimes weeks meaning people are being seen in a timelier manner.
- Our mobile crisis response teams have grown by 50% and our alternative co-responder teams have increased by four (4).
- Response time for all mobile crisis response is averaging 30 minutes or less.
- Workforce training has exploded with multiple training options each month allowing staff time to develop professionally.
- We have embraced innovation by embedding mental health staff into the 911 dispatch center to manage mental health calls to 911 and to deploy the right response which is not always law enforcement.
- We have trained over 700 law enforcement officers on how to use the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale and Motivational Interviewing techniques in the field.
- We are working closely with WSU Tech on development of a certificate and associates degree for a behavioral health tech to help build career paths for those desiring to enter the behavioral health care work force sooner, and
- We are continuing to explore ways to fill gaps in our community that are unique to our area such as patient and employee wellness, etc.

Those are just a few key areas of enhancement COMCARE has experienced since becoming a CCBHC. This truly is a model of Excellence and takes a solid foundation in community behavioral health to achieve. With this, I stand here in support of HB 2578 that would allow only licensed CMCHs to be certified as CCBHCs as originally intended in the 2021 legislation.

Thank you and I will stand for questions at the appropriate time.