



## Senate Education Committee

February 8, 2018

Presented by:

Rick Cagan

Executive Director

NAMI Kansas is the state organization of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a grassroots organization whose members are individuals living with mental illnesses and their family members. NAMI Kansas provides programs of peer support and education by and for our members through a statewide network of 15 local affiliates. We advocate for individuals who are living with mental illness to ensure their access to treatment and supportive services.

We are concerned about the language in SB 333 regarding the proposed amendments to the Jason Flatt Act. Whereas the adoption of the Jason Flatt Act represented only a minimal response to high levels of youth suicide, the current proposal represents an even lower standard of care by narrowing the number of school district who will be trained and eliminating any minimum level of training.

The threat of youth suicide requires the attention of all staff in school districts and other youth-serving organizations. Creating the right level of awareness of suicide risk factors should not be limited to a few select personnel. To that end, we are opposed to the proposed amendments to the Jason Flatt Act.

The start of many mental health conditions most often occurs in adolescence. Half of individuals living with mental illness experience onset by the age of 14. This number jumps to 75% by the age of 24.

One in five youth live with a mental health condition, but less than half of these individuals receive needed services. Undiagnosed, untreated or inadequately treated mental health conditions can affect a student's ability to learn, grow and develop.

Schools provide a unique opportunity to identify and treat mental health conditions by serving students where they already are. School personnel play an important role in identifying the early warning signs of an emerging mental health condition and in linking students with effective services and supports.

We need more school-based mental health services. These programs bring trained community mental health professionals into schools to provide mental health care or to link families to resources in the community. They provide access to services and supports and help reduce the confusion and isolation experienced by youth with mental health conditions and their families.

We also understand that schools are stretched very thin. We support increased funding to train school faculty and staff on the early warning signs of mental health conditions and how to link students to services. Funding would also allow school-based mental health professionals to coordinate services and supports between schools and the community mental health system.

NAMI Kansas stands ready to work with our school partners to bring programs like *NAMI Ending the Silence*<sup>1</sup> to student, parent, and school professional audiences.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://nami.org/ets>