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Written Testimony for Public Hearing House Committee on Children and Seniors
House Bill 2361
February 20, 2019

Dear Chairwoman, Concannon and members of the House Committee on Children and Seniors:

I serve as the Director of Safe Streets and Prevention Services for Shawnee Regional Prevention and Recovery Services, a substance abuse prevention organization which has served the Shawnee County community for more than 50 years.

As a leader of a local community coalition, I am testifying in favor of House Bill 2361. In 2014, the Student Data Privacy Act was passed, and as a result, it impacted our ability to best serve our community. While I certainly understand the concerns for student privacy, this act affected our ability to administer anonymous evaluations of prevention programs in the school settings. For example, if we implement an evidence-based prevention program in a school, or we even deliver an educational presentation, we are unable to measure if the program or presentation had an impact on the students without parents/guardians first giving permission. This creates an extreme burden on our school systems and makes effective measurement of our programs nearly impossible. And, as an agency that receives public moneys to address substance abuse, evaluations are a critical component of programming and reporting to our funders.

Our agency has utilized the Kansas Communities That Care (KCTC) Student Survey as a way to monitor local trends, select appropriate prevention strategies, report outcomes, acquire funds and guide data-informed decisions regarding services. KCTC is funded by the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) and has been offered annually, free of charge, to Kansas schools for students in 6th, 8th, 10th, and 12th grades since 1995, providing more than 20 years of behavioral health and wellness. The KCTC survey is completely anonymous, protecting the identity of individual students. Data are reported in aggregate with minimum reporting requirements, thus providing another level of protection. Since the Student Data Privacy Act's implementation, participation in the KCTC has dropped from as high as 80% to the current rate of 52% in Shawnee County. It has also created a significant burden on the school systems to monitor and track students who are opted-in to participate.

Passage of HB 2361 would retain parents' ability to choose which surveys will or will not be administered to their children, but it will reduce burden on parents, schools, and community coalitions by allowing parents to opt-out rather than specific requirements of opt-in. This will likely increase the participation in relevant surveys and the ability to gain even more precise data to measure progress toward outcomes and to guide decision-making.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kristi Pankratz
Director of Safe Streets and Prevention Services
Shawnee Regional Prevention and Recovery Services

