

Kari M. Bruffett, Secretary

Sam Brownback, Governor

To: Health and Human Services Committee
From: Lea Taylor, Assistant Secretary
Date: February 5, 2015
Subject: HB 2119, Mental Health Technician Fees

Chairman Hawkins and members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony in support of HB 2119. This legislation would help re-establish a needed level of care in mental health which has almost disappeared in Kansas. For that reason, KDADS supports passage of HB 2119 which would facilitate the return of licensed mental health technicians to state hospitals and other treatment settings.

At one time, state hospitals made extensive use of licensed mental health technicians, or LMHTs, to provide direct care services to patients. LMHTs obtained both formal classroom instruction and supervised clinical training on hospital grounds before they began to work with patients as credentialed staff. Although LMHTs do not have the nursing assessment skills of LPNs, they are able to provide direct care services at a more advanced level than beginning mental health workers. The higher level of training, and longer period of orientation to the treatment setting, gained by LMHTs is beneficial to both patients and staff.

Historically, the LMHT credential was something which attracted beginning nursing staff to state hospitals. It was valuable to those who earned it as a first step on their career ladder and something portable which they could take with them when they left hospital employment. Larned State Hospital and Osawatomie State Hospital are partnering with community colleges to make the training more accessible, especially in rural areas of the state where staff recruitment is often difficult. Classroom work can be done on the campus of a community college or at one of the state hospitals and clinical work can be done at a state hospital or other mental health setting. This makes it more likely that state hospitals can recruit and retain staff.

After completing LMHT training, employees who enjoy serving patients can pursue a nursing or other degree in the field of healthcare while continuing their employment as LMHTs. The benefits to both patients and employees are considerable.

KDADS supports the passage of HB 2119 in the expectation that the availability of LMHT programs near state hospitals will assist the agency in providing better care to their patients and more benefits to their employees.