

## Testimony to the Missouri House Committee: 2/14/18

To Members of the Senate Seniors, Families and Children Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Jane Smith, and I am the Director of Provident's Life Crisis Services, the crisis intervention and suicide prevention division of Provident. I am also a Licensed Professional Counselor in the state of Missouri.

I'm here today to speak in favor of SB 846. Provident is one of 9 national backup call centers for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and in 2017, we answered over 60,000 hotline calls, 30% of which are from suicidal callers. As part of the Lifeline network, we answer calls from every county in Missouri, and we regularly get phone calls from mental health professionals who do not know how to work with clients who have expressed thoughts of suicide. At Provident, we are humbled that we are able to provide this expertise, and we are equally concerned that all mental health professionals in Missouri haven't been given the benefit of learning these necessary life-saving skills.

In 2012, Missouri had the 20<sup>th</sup> highest rate of suicide in the U.S. In 2015, we had the 17<sup>th</sup> highest rate in the nation, and as of 2016, Missouri was ranked 14<sup>th</sup>. That represents a 7.7% increase in the number of suicides in just one year, and a 24% increase in five years. We as mental health professionals must do our part to reverse this alarming trend.

The skills of suicide risk assessment, safety planning and treatment are generally not taught in graduate level mental health curriculums. For example, the majority of mental health professionals with whom we have spoken are not aware that without adequate aftercare, individuals who are hospitalized for suicidality are at high risk for suicide after they are discharged from the hospital. Many mental health professionals are not able to perform a thorough suicide risk assessment on an at-risk client, nor develop a comprehensive safety plan with that client. And many do not know what therapies are evidence-based for the treatment of suicidality.

We believe all Missourians seeking mental health care for themselves or their loved ones have the right to expect that any licensed mental health professional with whom they are working will know how to address suicidality both calmly and competently. We feel strongly that effective suicide safety and treatment planning should be part of every licensed mental health professional's skill set.

SB 846 will ensure that mental health professionals in Missouri will use at least 2 hours of their required continuing education requirements to receive suicide prevention-related training on a regular basis. This training may be on-line or in-person, and may be attained at little or no expense, making this requirement accessible to all Missouri

mental health practitioners. To date, a handful of other states have enacted similar requirements. We believe SB 846 provides a unique opportunity to positively impact the quality of mental health care for all recipients, and for Missouri to be on the leading edge of this change. Thank you for your consideration.

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