

State of Kansas Senate Chamber

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Richard (Rick) Billinger
Senator, 40th District

Committee Assignments

Chair
Joint Committee on State Building
Construction

Vice-Chair
Ways and Means
Financial Institutions and Insurance

Member
Agriculture and Natural Resources

Newsletter
March 15, 2020

This week the Senate spent most of our time working in our individual committees on bills that have come over from the House along with Senate bills that were in exempt committees.

On Wednesday I testified before the Senate Health Committee on SB 407 that will require KDADS to open and operate acute mental health services for youth ages 6 to 18. Over 10 years ago when the acute care beds were closed in Larned it was agreed that acute care beds would be placed in Hays to replace the loss of beds in Larned. This October 2019 secretary of KDADS closed the acute care beds in Hays. This facility was operated by KVC who had operated the facility for over 10 years. Currently, when parents show up in Hays with a child needing psychiatric help, they are being told the Hays facility is closed, and you will either have to go to Wichita or Kansas City for help. Since October 2019 we have had 45 families who have driven to Hays 18 have been referred to Wichita and 11 to Kansas City. No one knows the number of families that arrived in Hays for help, and after being told the options of Wichita or Kansas City have just decided to return home. This puts a real burden on families. Some of these parents have jobs and other children at home. My concern is that without psychiatric help any one of these children could harm themselves or someone else. Since the closer in Hays, parents and families in Southwest Kansas are also faced with the same options of Wichita or Kansas City. The bill proposes psychiatric beds in Hays as well as Garden City or the surrounding area. Laura Howard, secretary of KADDS, spoke in favor of the bill. She said the lack of psychiatric beds west of Wichita could create problems for families. Chairman Senator Suellentrop agreed to work the bill this coming week.

Some good news, since the acute care beds were closed in October 2019, (PRTF) Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities beds in Hays, run by KVC, has added an additional 38 long-term care beds.

The Senate Ways and Means Committee heard two bills this week to discuss paying off nearly \$300 million of the state's debt toward KPERS. Both SB368 and HB2503 authorize the state to transfer \$268,412,000 from the state general fund to the KPERS fund before the end of fiscal year 2020. Both the Senate and House Bills do not re-amortize KPERS.

The Senate Ways and Means passed the budget and it will be worked on the Senate floor Tuesday. There is one major difference between the Senate and House budget that was highly discussed. The Senate wants to stop the continued transfer of funds from KDOT to the state general fund, the House budget did not. Our Senate Ways and Means Committee agreed that we would not transfer \$50 million from KDOT to the state general fund, which the Governor had recommended in her budget,

It is an honor and pleasure to serve the 40th Senate District of Kansas. Please do not hesitate to contact me by email at rick.billinger@senate.ks.gov or you may call me with your questions or concerns. My office number is 785 296-7399 or my call number is 785 899-4700.