



March 14, 2018

Steve Coen, President and CEO
Kansas Health Foundation

Testimony for House Health and Human Services Committee in support of SB 312

Chairman Hawkins and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your interest, willingness and leadership to advance this discussion on SB 312, licensure of dental therapists. Some of you have been aware of this journey to expand dental care in Kansas for a number of years. Please know how appreciative we are to be at this point today.

This bill represents a vision to meet a growing challenge of dental care in our state. It represents several organizations who are experts in the delivery of dental care, including the Kansas Dental Association (KDA) and the Kansas Dental Hygienists' Association (KDHA). It represents organizations that see the needs of Kansans, including those in rural communities, safety net clinics, schools and for those who cannot afford care. And, it represents our work at the Kansas Health Foundation (KHF) to improve access to care and overall health.

KHF appreciates the direction of SB 312, to provide a mid-level dental healthcare provider (a dental therapist) as a part of the solution to improve access to dental care in Kansas. Connecting dental therapist with dentists who are associated with safety net clinics or accept Medicaid patients clearly allows for more dental resources for those most at-risk.

Without access to dental care, many Kansans are forced to go without the check-ups and preventive care they need to stay healthy and prevent more expensive medical problems. Dental health isn't just about teeth. We know that poor oral health can lead to serious health problems in other parts of the body, including heart disease, diabetes and stroke. For children in particular, poor dental health can lead to lifelong medical problems and greatly impact their ability to learn in school.

To further demonstrate our commitment to dental health, KHF has offered to help with program evaluation, through an independent, third-party nongovernmental organization. This effort would help to identify the effectiveness, reach, quality and sustainability of the dental therapist initiative, and help to identify gaps or other opportunities to expand dental care in the future. We are happy to bring our support in this capacity, to help assure the ongoing success of this care model.

Chairman Hawkins and committee members, thank you for your consideration of this important issue. We appreciate your partnership in helping to improve the health of all Kansans.

Background on Kansas Health Foundation

The Kansas Health Foundation is based in Wichita, but statewide in its focus. With a mission to improve the health of all Kansans, KHF envisions a culture in which every Kansan can make healthy choices where they live, work and play. To achieve this, KHF focuses its work in four impact areas: access to affordable health care, healthy behaviors, civic and community engagement and educational attainment. During its 30-year history, KHF has provided more than \$500 million in grants to Kansas communities and organizations, and looks forward to working toward its mission and vision for many years to come.