



Testimony to Senate Public Health & Welfare Committee – Written Only
February 1, 2018
Re SB312, dental therapists

Thank you to the Chair and members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of expanding access to dental care. We appreciate the efforts of legislators and advocates to move forward with a long-needed bill towards expanding the ability of low-income Kansans to access dental services.

Saint Francis Community Services is a **mission-driven nonprofit** centered in the Episcopal tradition. With roots as a home for ‘wayward youths’ in Ellsworth, Kansas in 1945, Saint Francis Community Services now provides youth residential services, substance abuse treatment programs, behavioral health, and child welfare case management across 76 counties in Kansas. Saint Francis currently employs upwards of 1100 Kansans across our service areas. The mission of Saint Francis Community Services is *to provide healing and hope to children and families*.

As part of our child welfare services, SFCS provides case management services to over 3,400 children in foster care. As part of our case coordination, we work to connect children needing dental care with dental providers. Because children in foster care are served through the Medical card, case managers, parents, or foster placements must connect children with dentists that accept Medicaid. There is a severe shortage of dentists that accept Medicaid in our service areas, which means children must be transported long distances to receive dental care and that children are experiencing long delays when treatment is needed. **While we support the step forward that SB312 represents, we also hope to see continued efforts to address the need for dental care for children in Kansas.**

We appreciate the awareness brought to the need for dental therapists by advocates over the years. Below are some comments from SFCS social workers that demonstrate the **unique challenges to foster youth, placements, and service providers in accessing dental care** in communities we serve across the State:

- **Western Kansas:** Our clients experience long wait times to be seen. Dentists who accept Medicaid are few and far between. Often, if children need specialized services these are not available except in a metro area, so **travel expenses are incurred** for parents/placements to ensure the child’s dental needs are met. Even then, there are long wait times for an appointment.

- **Liberal** does not have a dentist that will take the medical card. The closest dentists are in **Garden City** and **Dodge City**. Dodge City only has one or two dentists who take the medical card. They ones in Garden City are so busy you can have to wait more than a month. Some children are **traveling 1 ½ to 2 hours to the dentist**.
- In **Hays**, there are not enough providers that accept the Medical card.
- Family Preservation staff in the **Hutchinson and Newton** areas are referring their families to the **free dental clinic** to be held in Hutchinson in February.
- **Salina**: Access to dental care is especially a problem for children that are placed here or returned home to parents. We currently have one provider that will take the medical card. **Typically to get an appointment a client has to call daily until an opening arises**. They don't take future scheduled appointments. This is **very difficult for parents and foster parents that are working**.
- In **Concordia**, providers but are **usually booked out 4-6 months so recommended treatment deadlines are difficult or impossible to meet**.
- For **Emporia** area families, we only have one provider that takes the medical card. Families have to choose between **delayed services closer to home, or more timely service by travelling** to another community.
- In **Great Bend**, we no longer have a dentist who accepts medical card. The closest dentist is now in Larned or Hays for clients.
- In **Kansas City**, our office (formerly AYS) coordinates a Youth Health Days event through USD500. We have seen that about 40% of the students don't get regular dental care. Some because of lack of coverage; others because of parental neglect. When we try to recruit volunteer dentists or hygienists to do screenings at our events, there is a shortage of hygienists, and **most dentists don't have anyone to cover for them if they volunteer to come out**.

We support the effort and commitment to improved health outcomes reflected in SB312. At the same time, we are concerned that **the level of oversight required in SB312 may limit the potential positive impact of the bill for youth we serve** given the severe shortage of dental providers serving low-income patients. Please consider the needs of youth in foster care for timely, local, quality dental care as you consider SB312.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rachel Y. Marsh, JD, MSW
 Executive Director, Public Policy
rachel.marsh@st-francis.org
 (620) 200-0635