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Kansas Health Foundation

Testimony for Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee on SB312

Chairwoman Schmidt and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your interest, willingness and leadership to advance this discussion on SB 312, for 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 the 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, in safety net clinics, in schools and for Kansans who cannot afford care. And, it represents the Kansas Health Foundation (KHF), and our work to improve access to care and overall health.

KHF appreciates the intent and direction of SB312, 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. By connecting the 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 costly medical problems. Dental health isn't just about teeth. We know that poor dental health leads to poor health 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.

Senator Schmidt, we greatly appreciate your leadership and willingness to bring the professional organizations together, along with hearing the needs of safety net groups, to expand our dental workforce to meet the future needs of Kansas. We have been extremely encouraged by the continuing discussions between the KDA and KDHA to clarify the language regarding the roles of both general and direct supervision. We appreciate the recent compromises the KDA has agreed to, which we believe creates the first steps of better access to dental care.

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To further demonstrate our commitment to dental health, KHF would offer to help with program evaluation as 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.

Senator Schmidt, again thank you for your leadership. 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 our 30-year history, we have provided more than \$500 million in grants to Kansas communities and organizations, and look forward to many more years of working toward our mission and vision.