



To: Chair Hilderbrand and Members, Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee  
From: Rachel Monger, Vice President of Government Affairs, LeadingAge Kansas  
Date: February 16, 2021

### **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 129**

Thank you, Chairman Hilderbrand and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide support to Senate Bill 129. I am Rachel Monger, Vice President of Government Affairs for LeadingAge Kansas, the state association for not-for-profit aging services. We have 160 members across Kansas, which include not-for-profit nursing homes, retirement communities, hospital long-term care units, assisted living, homes plus, housing, low-income housing, home health agencies, home and community based service programs, PACE and Meals on Wheels. Our members serve more than 25,000 elders each day.

LeadingAge Kansas supports Senate Bill 129, and its creation of a new dental therapist license category. The purpose of the new mid-level practitioner license is to improve access and affordability of dental care to underserved populations, including those without dental insurance or for persons receiving Medicaid. Recruitment and retention of dentists has been an ongoing problem in Kansas, and many of our current dentists are approaching retirement with no one to replace them.

Access to routine dental care is an essential health issue for elder Kansans. Most people lose their dental insurance coverage when they retire. Medicare does not cover routine dental care, and only provides a few limited services deemed "medically necessary." Medicaid also no longer covers oral health care for adults, except for "emergency services." Under KanCare, MCOs offer a limited number of preventative dental visits a year. Nursing home residents and elders who are home-bound or disabled often have limited access to dental care. Nursing homes do not employ dental staff, and transportation and access to a dentist's office is often a steep barrier (especially in rural areas). The creation of dental therapists would provide the opportunity for regular dental treatment, rather than seniors relying on emergency care that comes too late.

We thank the committee for its time and consideration of this issue. We hope you will support the passage of Senate Bill 129.