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Wilson Medical Center provides excellence in promoting, improving, and restoring health

To: Senate House Committee

From: Dennis R. Shelby *DRS*

Date: February 15, 2021

I am Dennis Shelby, CEO of Wilson Medical Center in Neodesha. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide comments in support of SB 175 which creates the Rural Emergency Hospital.

Wilson Medical Center is a 15 bed Critical Access Hospital in southeast Kansas. Neodesha is a town of approximately 2,400 in Wilson County that has a population of less than 9,000. We were the first county hospital in the state of Kansas and we have been in operation for over 104 years.

Kansas hospitals are struggling. A large majority are fighting to keep their doors open. In the last five years, three hospitals (Mercy in Independence, Mercy in Ft. Scott and Oswego Hospital) have closed.

I would like to focus on two areas of concern:

- The overall health status of Kansans is declining more than any other state. Wilson County, where I reside, is ranked near the bottom. We rank 94th out of 102 counties. We who deliver care in rural areas have a disproportionate share of citizens with chronic health conditions. The populations we serve in our rural hospitals are “an older, sicker and poorer citizenship” than our urban counterparts. This all points to the importance of having quality, accessible primary and emergency care nearby.
- Most healthcare is delivered outside of the acute care setting. We have seen this shift to outpatient over the past two decades. Inpatient stays continue to decline due to quality primary care providers, emergency medicine, rehabilitation, home health services, pharmaceuticals, ancillary services, technology and medical specialties available onsite and through telemedicine. Those who require complex care are transferred to other facilities. For the reasons I have just stated, another level of care, a Rural Emergency Hospital, is an alternative that could keep most healthcare local and allow our citizens in rural Kansas to be treated in their community versus their hospital closing.

I was fortunate to be a part of the Kansas Hospital Association project group that developed an alternative rural health model (Primary Health Center) that is very close to the Rural Emergency Hospital being introduced at the federal level. I believe this model offers a sustainable option for many rural communities. This model will address many issues and I would like to mention a couple:

- As stated earlier, the Rural Hospital Model (REH) allows communities access to most everything a rural community utilizes, such as medical clinics, radiology, laboratory, telemedicine, specialty clinics as well as a 24/7 emergency room.
- This REH model will keep quality healthcare access available in communities, which is the best way to deliver such care. It will be sustainable and cost effective, meeting the needs of schools and business and industry, and allowing for economic development growth.

I am committed to working closely with KHA and its member hospitals who are interested in bringing this model to their communities.

I am available to the Senate Health Committee should you have any questions now or in the future to make the necessary changes required for the Rural Emergency Hospital to be another level of care in Kansas.