



**SWOPE HEALTH
SERVICESSM**

TO: Chairman Hawkins, House Health and Human Services Committee
FROM: Michelle Keller, VP-Community Engagement, Development and Outreach
DATE: February 9, 2017
RE: House Bill 2139 – Support

On behalf of Swope Health Services, I am pleased to provide a letter of support for House Bill 2139-Licensure of Dental Therapists

Swope Health Services operates nine clinics across the greater Kansas City metro area, including two clinics in Wyandotte County. In 2015, our patient count for our two Wyandotte clinics was nearly 6,500 with a full 80% being uninsured. It is our mission to serve regardless of ability to pay and consequently, none of these patients were turned away because they did not have insurance. We consider healthcare a basic human right and we do what we can to offer it to those who need it most.

One area that continues to tax the healthcare system is dental care. Delayed dental care often means trips to the ER, as reported in a story appearing in *USA Today* in June 2015. No doubt the problem has only increased since then in states like ours that have yet to expand Medicaid and provide dental benefits to adults.

House Bill 2139 provides for a solution to many of the problems outlined in the *USA Today* article:

- **Access**—In Kansas, 83% of our counties do not have enough dentists to serve the population and 14 do not have a dentist at all. With dental therapists, more people will have the ability to receive dental care.
- **Ongoing preventive care**—Dental therapists will mean more opportunities to treat dental issues before they become emergency room visits.
- **Source of jobs and economic growth**— In 2011, 19 Dental Therapists in Alaska created 76 jobs, generating \$9 million in economic activity. For every \$1 they generate in revenue, it only cost 0.30 cents to employ them.

Providing dental care in the community health center setting will further reap benefits as community health centers are one of the more cost-effective healthcare delivery systems. Despite providing a broader array of services and serving more at-risk patients, community health centers' average cost runs a dollar less per patient per day compared to all physician settings (\$1.67 vs. \$2.64).**

In closing, we believe dental therapists provide a viable solution to the lack of affordable, accessible dental care in our state. We urge you to support passage of HB 2139. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this position.

**USA TODAY, "ER visits for dental problems on the rise", June 29, 2015, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/06/29/er-dental-visits/29492599/>*

***Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Medical Expenditure Survey Summary Tables, 2008. <http://meps.ahrq.gov>. And Bureau of Primary Health Care, Health Resources and Services Administration, DHHS. 2009 Uniform Data. System.*