



**Kansas Health Foundation**

**February 14, 2017**

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Kansas Health Foundation

*Testimony for House Health and Human Services Committee on HB2139*

Chairman Dan Hawkins and Members of the Committee:

### **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, the Foundation focuses its grant making in two primary program areas: Health Equity, with the goal of reducing health disparities related to social and economic factors; and Civic Health, with the goal of inspiring, informing and equipping Kansans to improve the health of our state. 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.

### **KHF History Addressing Health Profession Shortages**

The Kansas Health Foundation has a proud history of closing gaps across the state's health profession shortages with systemic, long-term solutions.

For example, in the early 1990s when the state faced a profound shortage of primary care providers, the Foundation funded a collaborative effort to support the University of Kansas Medical Center (KUMC), Wichita State University (WSU) and Fort Hays State University (FHSU) to implement a multi-site Master of Science Primary Care Nurse Practitioner program. Since this collaborative began, more than 650 nurse practitioners have graduated from the program, and are now serving in 91 Kansas counties.

Additionally, through a grant to WSU, KHF helped double the size of the physician assistant (PA) program. The most recent data show approximately 95 percent of PA graduates remained in Kansas, with 34 percent practicing in rural parts of the state.

### **Dental Health Provider Shortage and the Dental Therapist**

Now, our state faces a similar and critical healthcare profession shortage in regards to oral health.

During our organization's history, we have regularly engaged Kansans to ask them what they believe are the leading health problems in their communities. Time and time again Kansans have consistently listed oral health care as a primary health concern, noting there are not enough providers to meet their needs. Further, very few providers accept Medicaid coverage.

Data backs up these views, as according to one statewide review 87 of Kansas' 105 counties do not have enough dental providers to meet the needs of their populations. This trend is especially true in rural areas, and projections show this trend will worsen as "baby boomer" dentists retire.

### **Potential Solutions**

The Kansas Health Foundation, as well as numerous other foundation and nonprofit partners, views the creation of a mid-level dental therapist position in Kansas as an effective way to combat this provider shortage. By establishing dental therapists in Kansas, our state would be utilizing a sustainable, proven solution to improve oral health care for Kansans.

This type of practitioner became an even more appealing and credible option following the decision by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) to approve educational standards for dental therapy. This national body, which is the same entity that certifies programs for dentists and dental hygienists, has now recognized this level of practitioner as a part of our nation's oral health profession.

### **KHF Will Provide Funding Support**

Besides the Foundation's overall commitment to the strategy of deploying dental therapists, I want to confirm that we are financially committed to making this program a success once it is approved by the state legislature. We believe there are various educational opportunities to help move this forward, and serve the most pressing needs of our state.

### **The Right Move for Kansas**

By moving forward to approve the position of a dental therapist, Kansas could join other U.S. states—including Alaska, Minnesota and Maine—and more than 54 countries throughout the world in working to address oral health provider shortages through a credible, proven and cost-effective method.

For these reasons and more, we support the dental therapist model for Kansans. Thank you for the opportunity to submit supportive testimony for this critical health issue for the people Kansas.