

February 14, 2017

Annie McKay, President & CEO
Kansas Action for Children
Testimony in Support of House Bill 2139
House Health and Human Services Committee

Chairman Hawkins and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to support establishing dental therapists in Kansas. Kansas Action for Children's vision is to make Kansas the best state to raise a child, and our organization shapes health, education, and economic policies that benefit Kansas children and their families. **We support House Bill 2139 because dental therapists will meaningfully improve Kansas children's access to oral health care.**

Oral health is critically important for children's overall health and well-being. Dental decay is the most common chronic childhood illness – five times more prevalent than asthma. Dental pain can make it difficult for children to succeed in school, eat healthy foods, or live an active life. No Kansas child should have to live with constant, debilitating toothaches.

Too many Kansas children struggle to access dental care. Eighty-seven Kansas counties are designated as dental workforce shortage areas, meaning that they lack sufficient dental providers to serve their needs. Parents working low-wage jobs in a community that lacks dental providers may find it difficult to take their child to the dentist. The one in three Kansas children insured by KanCare face the additional challenge of finding a dental provider who accepts their insurance. Federal data indicates that more than 161,000 Kansas children covered by KanCare did not report receiving any dental care in 2015.

Dental therapists will help address this problem. Dentists who utilize dental therapists to perform routine care can operate their team more efficiently, making it more cost-effective to serve patients with KanCare insurance. Supervising dentists choosing to authorize dental therapists to work under general supervision can expand their team's reach to provide care in schools and early childhood settings. This approach allows dental teams to serve children whose parents' job schedules or limited transportation options create additional barriers to accessing care.

Dental therapists will help more Kansas children access the regular dental care they need to be healthy. Kansas Action for Children encourages the Committee to support allowing Kansas dentists and safety net clinics to hire dental therapists, and thanks you for your consideration of House Bill 2139.

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