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House Committee on Taxation

October 11-12, 2011

Sean Gatewood, Interim Executive Director
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Chairman Kleeb and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to provide written testimony today.

My name is Sean Gatewood and I am the Interim Executive Director of the Kansas Health Consumer Coalition, a statewide organization with the mission of advocating for affordable, accessible and quality health care in Kansas. Since 2005, KHCC has brought together diverse individuals and organizations to build a coordinated voice for consumers, in particular the uninsured and underinsured, and to support policies that improve access to integrated medical, behavioral and dental health care for all Kansans.

Our primary mission is to improve access; we support anything that will improve the overall health of Kansans. For both of these reasons we support HB2306. We are very concerned about the state's budget and the possible cuts to critical health infrastructure and services. According to the United Health Foundations annual ranking of states health; Kansas is already lagging behind in public health program funding. This and other reasons are the drivers of Kansas's dip in the rankings to its current spot at #27. We also know that Medicaid is critical to the health infrastructure around the state. This program is the second largest expenditure in the state budget therefore it is a likely target for drastic budget cuts. This tax will help shore up budget shortfalls that may otherwise force drastic cuts to health services for children, seniors, people with disabilities and the poor.

This bill improves the overall health of Kansans. While assisting in our budget crisis this bill also has several key positive externalities that will also serve to make Kansas a healthier place to live for all of us. In the state health rankings mentioned above, one very positive section is the progress Kansas has made in smoking rates. We think this bill will further reduce smoking rates in our state, especially among younger Kansans. This reduction will then serve to continue lowering the cost of healthcare to the state of Kansas and its citizens for decades to come.

For these reasons we believe that HB2306 is sound policy for the physical and fiscal health of the state and its citizens.

Thank you once again for allowing me to submit this testimony.