

Senators serving on the Ways and Means Committee,

I feel compelled to reach out to you to share my thoughts and testimony on the upcoming discussion you will be having in the Senate Ways and Means Committee regarding the Medicaid dental rate increase for the KDHE budget, from my personal and professional perspective.

I have cared for our community as a pediatric dental specialist in Johnson County for the last 20 years, after completing my pediatric dental residency at Children's Mercy Hospital in 2005. During my career, I have had the privilege of maintaining and restoring dental health to many thousands of children and creating relationships with families that span generations. I have cared for these children with respect and compassion and have always opened my doors to ALL children, regardless of their abilities or socioeconomic status. This means that I, and the associate dentists I employ, have been proud Medicaid providers since the inception of my practice. While Medicaid reimbursements are understandably lower than private insurance reimbursements, the gap between Medicaid reimbursements and the costs to serve these patients has grown to a level that is no longer sustainable.

Post-covid, we all know that costs to operate a business have greatly increased. My payroll costs, to hire qualified support staff, has gone up 35%. My supply costs have gone up at a similar rate. However, reimbursements for my services to the children of our state have remained the same. Unlike a restaurant or other business, I am unable to pass along the increased costs-to-do-business to my patients as I am limited by payment from insurance companies. Prior to Covid, I could cover the loss I took on Medicaid reimbursements with the margins from my private insurance patients. Yet now all margins are smaller, so I am actually losing money when I choose to see a family with Medicaid, especially those children who are medically compromised with special healthcare needs requiring more time or sedation dentistry.

As a dedicated public servant, I know everyone on this committee understands the commitment we feel to the families we serve, and I never want a family's insurance to limit their ability to receive the best pediatric dental care available. However, being a Medicaid dental provider is currently not a tenable way to maintain a business and it is the unfortunate reality I am facing. So I am in an ethical dilemma as a pediatric dentist and business owner, who supports the local economy of Johnson County as an employer and business, yet also desires to serve all local children and children across the state. I have a fiduciary responsibility to keep the doors open to my practice to continue to serve patients, but serving those patients with Medicaid is hindering me from keeping my doors open.

I urge you to vote in favor of the Medicaid dental rate increase for the KDHE budget. If we want specialized, privately owned expert care available for ALL of the children of our community and state, we must make the hard choices to fund the services we are asking our healthcare professionals to provide.

I welcome you into my privately owned Shawnee and Lenexa dental offices anytime to witness the amazing care we provide for all children (many coming from all over the state for specialized, expert care) and please feel free to reach out to me with any questions regarding this decision or anything related to dental care in our state. While the initial increase has been reduced by the House, it will take this increase in the budget, with the additional federal match, to raise the rates in Kansas in a way to meaningfully increase the dental provider network.

Thank you for all you do for the citizens, and especially children, of our great state.

Gratefully,

Jill C Jenkins DDS

Fellow, American Board of Pediatric Dentistry
Founder and Pediatric Dentist, Jenkins Dentistry for Kids
Member, Shawnee and Lenexa Chamber of Commerce
Current ADA Delegate representing Kansas
Past President Kansas Dental Association
Past President Fifth District Dental Society
Founder, Kansas City Women Dentists

Additional facts:

The Kansas Medicaid dental rates are significantly lower than in neighboring Missouri, where a recent rate increase led to a 43% rise in providers participating in the Missouri Medicaid program.

Nearly 40% of Kansas counties have no Medicaid dental providers. Dentists report that low reimbursement rates are the top barrier to becoming Medicaid providers. In Kansas, only 30% of dentists bill Medicaid.