

March 5, 2025

Chairman Billinger and members of the Committee,

I am Tammy Vicin, and I am here on behalf of my brother, Jim Woods. I have been Jim's guardian, caregiver, and advocate full time since 2015. First, I'd like to tell you a bit about my wonderful brother! Jim is the youngest of four siblings. He will turn 56 years old on October 29th. He was born with cerebral palsy, the result of his umbilical cord wrapped around his neck during birth, cutting off oxygen to his brain. Our parents always sought out the best specialists to advise them on the best path and treatment for Jim's development and future. This often involved traveling out of state as a family when we were young. They wanted the best life for Jim, advocating for him just like I am doing now. Jim loves so many things in life, as we all do – going to church, ballgames, out to eat, trucks, tractors, riding his golf cart, and just being around people! He does not like to stay home unless we have company – he likes to be on the go! Jim is smart, funny, ornery, handsome, and a big flirt!

In the early 1980s, Jim had two separate falls at school. One resulted in a front tooth being knocked out; the other resulted in the other front tooth being badly broken. Jim underwent two dental procedures at the dentist office, totaling 6 ½ hours to repair his teeth. The replantation of his knocked out tooth was unsuccessful, resulting in Jim only having one front tooth for almost 20 years. Eventually our mom found a dentist in the late 1990s that would treat Jim under general anesthesia in the hospital. This setting was a strong recommendation from Jim's PCP who always emphasized that it was too risky for Jim to be sedated in an office setting. Jim had the treatment he needed and deserved, receiving his dental bridge in 2000, restoring his dignity and smile! 😊

From that time on, Jim received annual cleanings, exams, and treatments in the hospital by his dentists. Although these dentists did not accept adult Medicaid, and Jim did not have dental insurance, our widowed mother saved every year to pay the dentist out of pocket.

In 2015, I contacted Jim's dentist to set up his appointment and was informed that he no longer did the procedure in the hospital, citing new guidelines and reduced hospital privileges. I had no other choice but to have Jim treated in his office, against his PCP's advice.

In 2016, Jim's case manager told me that he could get care at GraceMed, which he did. In 2017, Jim was diagnosed with Gerd and denied for future treatment at GraceMed due to potential risk with sedation. Now what do we do???

In 2019, Jim's wonderful case manager told us about Dr. Nick Rogers in Ark City. He had hospital privileges there, and I was so thankful that Jim would be able to get safe dental care, even if we had to travel an hour plus away. We have gone there the past four or five years and had a wonderful experience every time! The staff there truly care about Jim, and I know that he is in great hands. Dr. Nick is truly compassionate and understands that Jim will not cooperate with an

oral evaluation, and he will just have to take care of him once he sees him in the O.R. Dr. Nick always takes the time to explain everything and answer any questions I have. He assures me that he will take good care of Jim!

I do my best every day to brush Jim's teeth. Some days go better than others. I do not expect Dr. Nick to perform miracles; I know I have to do my part! I know several moms who struggle with their special needs child's oral health. It is more common than not that brushing their teeth is a daily fight or struggle.

I am advocating for more dentists around all communities in our state to accept, care for, and treat the adult special needs community. Their lives are difficult enough, why should they have to travel hours away for dental care?? We know that this will take an immense amount of work and changes in how our state reimburses dentists, as well as how hospital privileges are granted for those higher risk patients requiring that level of care.

As you all know, oral health care is so vital to one's overall health, yet it is not easily accessible for special needs adults. My brother receives great medical care, has access to specialists, treatments, procedures, tests, and therapy his doctor orders. I am baffled and frustrated by all the barriers keeping Jim and others from receiving the so important oral health care they need and deserve!

From everything I have learned, increasing the Medicaid dental rates would go a long way to getting more dentists to provide care for people with disabilities.

I am hopeful and optimistic that with the help of Oral Health Kansas and the many wonderful advocates willing to be a voice and not give up, we will remove the barriers standing in the way.

Thank you,
Tammy Vicin
Wichita