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ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Registered Dental Practitioner Program – HB 2079
Written Testimony to the House Human and Health Services Committee
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Chair Dan Hawkins and other distinguished members of the House Health and Human Services Committee, I am pleased to submit this written testimony regarding the education of Registered Dental Practitioners in Kansas. At Fort Hays State University, we live by our motto: *Forward Thinking. World Ready.* We fully support an education program for the RDP in Kansas in meeting the needs of the mid-level dental workforce.

Kansas has a serious problem when it comes to access to dental care, especially for rural areas of the state. In fact, 95 counties do not have enough dentists to serve their population, and 13 have no dentists at all. With the average dentist in Kansas approaching retirement age, the problem is only going to escalate. One-third of Kansas children receive health insurance through our state's KanCare. However, 37 Kansas counties do not have a single KanCare dental provider. Most of these providers are in the western half of the state of Kansas, Fort Hays State University's primary service area.

This new program is very similar to Fort Hays State University's response to the need of medical diagnostic imaging specialists. At the request of the Kansas Hospital Association and rural community health care professionals, a number of years ago we developed a special education program to produce medical diagnostic imaging professionals who are licensed in multiple modalities. This permits clinics and hospitals to hire one individual who is licensed to do the job of radiology technologists, MRI and CAT scan specialists, etc. The purpose of this example is to exemplify the need to such mid-level providers in Kansas, and their benefits to our communities.

The RDP training program will ensure Kansas students stay within the state and garner others from around the globe. Students will benefit by pursuing a career path that provides job security and good pay.

More importantly, the state of Kansas stands to benefit substantially. Adults and children across the state are facing a serious problem when it comes to dental care. Often, they live in pain because they can't find a dentist in their community or afford to pay for services. RDPs could help solve this problem. They'll work in rural areas where dentists are scarce. They'll be cost-effective employees for safety-net clinics that serve the uninsured. They'll extend the reach of dentists and work as a team with dentists to ensure that all Kansans have access to quality, affordable dental care.

Kansas is experiencing the negative effects of the dental workforce shortage, and as the shortage continues to worsen, it is clear that we need a solution that will work for the rural areas of the state. It's time for a solution that works for Kansas, provides Kansans with strong jobs, and strengthens our rural communities. Fort Hays State University is supportive of passage of the RDP legislation as it will create a workforce to address a needed service for rural and western Kansas.

Realizing the current budget situation in Kansas, funding has been discussed among various private entities to begin the program. Subsequently, the degree and program curriculum will be designed for approval by the Kansas Board of Regents with no state appropriations are needed to start the program.

The movement on the national level is clear – mid-level dental providers are already successful in Alaska and Minnesota, and it's only a matter of time before they become a fully integrated part of the dental workforce. It's time for Kansas to adopt Registered Dental Practitioners to increase the workforce, just as we have done with medical care to meet the needs in our communities. Fort Hays State University is excited to support this new initiative and bring national recognition to Kansas education.

Thank you.