



Feb. 24, 2015

Testimony for House Health and Human Services Committee Hearing on SB 2079

Chairman Hawkins and members of the Committee,

The Kansas Dental Project respectfully submits testimony in support of HB 2079 on behalf of the more than 50 members of the Coalition. A gap in the dental workforce leaves 95 of Kansas' 105 counties without enough dental providers, affecting rural and urban communities, businesses and families, regardless of where they live or if they are insured. Physician assistants and nurse practitioners have already helped address the medical workforce shortage. This bill allows Registered Dental Practitioners to do the same for the dental workforce.

RDPs will be dental hygienists who obtain advanced education and training and pass a comprehensive clinical exam. RDPs will always work under the supervision of a dentist. They will provide routine and preventive care — like cleanings, fillings and simple extractions. RDPs will work in dental offices and community settings, such as nursing homes and schools. Other states and 52 other countries are addressing dental workforce shortages by utilizing mid-level dental providers. Every study conducted on providers like RDPs shows they provide safe, quality care to patients.

Growing businesses

RDPs will allow dentists to grow their practices and treat more patients in an efficient and cost-effective manner. By employing just one RDP, a dental practice will be able to schedule 2,000 to 3,000 more appointments annually. The RDP model will also benefit hygienists by giving them an opportunity to learn new skills and advance their careers. They will be trained right here in Kansas and work under supervising dentists. Allowing hygienists to expand their skill sets will benefit their careers, patients and the dental practices where they work.

Ensuring healthy Kansans

Hundreds of thousands of Kansans lack access to dental care. Untreated dental problems often lead to major medical problems, such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke. Senior citizens, people with disabilities and children are particularly affected. For children, poor dental health leads to lifelong medical problems and can inhibit their ability to learn. Tooth decay is the No. 1 chronic childhood illness — five times more prevalent than asthma. By adding RDPs to the dental workforce, more adults and children will have reliable access to routine, preventive oral health care.

Providing cost-effective care

The dental workforce shortage affects all Kansans, whether it's through higher costs for dental services, increased insurance premiums or the growing burden of uncompensated care on community hospitals and clinics. RDPs will be able to provide high-quality, cost-effective routine and preventive care and will cost less to educate and employ than a dentist. This is especially beneficial for Kansas' safety-net clinics, which will be able to utilize state dollars more efficiently.

The RDP model is ideal for Kansas and its economy. Your support of HB 2079 will help grow businesses, ensure Kansas have access to regular dental care and save money.