

February 23, 2015

The Honorable Mary Pilcher-Cook,
Chair, Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

Reference: SB 49 – Concerning Licensure of Registered Dental Practitioners

Good afternoon Madam Chair and members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee. I am Judy Bellome and I am a retired registered nurse with over 45 years of practice in hospitals and long term care facilities. Until 2013, I served as the Chief Executive Officer of a visiting nurses home care and hospice. I am also an AARP Kansas volunteer. AARP Kansas represents more than 320,000 members across Kansas. Please accept our written testimony in support of SB 49.

Despite opposition by some physicians and specialty societies, the strong trend over the past 20 years has been a growing receptivity on the part of state legislatures to expanded scopes of practice for dental hygienists. For example, in 2007, Pennsylvania expanded the legal scope of practice for dental hygienists, with resultant improved health care outcomes statewide.

Legislators who craft scope of practice laws must balance the competing interests of quality, cost, and access. Increasingly states are confronted with dire access-to-care problems in areas with inadequate provider supply. There simply are not enough dentists to care for an aging population now, and their patient load will dramatically increase as more people gain access to dental care. In addition, there is growing interest in greater flexibility in use of health professionals because it is necessary for emerging models of care delivery that seek to improve coordination and efficiency.

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Current federal regulations and policies should be interpreted to allow dental hygienists to “fully and independently practice as defined by their education and certification.”

AARP supports states’ efforts to:

- Allow all professionals to provide services to the full extent of their current knowledge, training, experience, and skills where evidence indicates services can be provided safely and effectively.
- Allow and expect different professions to share overlapping scopes of practice.
- Amend current scope of practice laws and regulations to allow health professionals, such as dental hygienists, to perform duties for which they have been educated and certified.

Therefore, AARP Kansas supports SB 49. We request your support of this bill.

Respectfully,
Judith A. Bellome, RN, BSNEd, MSEd