



Virgil Watson
Chief Executive Officer

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TO: Chairman Hawkins, House Health and Human Services Committee
FROM: Virgil Watson Jr., Chief Executive Officer
DATE: January 27, 2017
RE: House Bill 2064 – Support

On behalf of South Central Kansas Medical Center I am pleased to provide a letter of support for House Bill 2064, The Bridge to a Healthy Kansas.

More than 150,000 Kansans need access to affordable health care. Locally we provide services to roughly 50,000 men, women, and children residing within South Central Kansas, specifically Cowley County and the surrounding area. Over 7,000 of our friends, neighbors, and coworkers currently qualify for KanCare or fall within the coverage “gap”. Those caught within the gap earn too much to qualify for KanCare but too little to be eligible to get financial help to buy private insurance. Without regular care, the uninsured often wait until their health concerns reach the point of needing emergency care, which comes at a higher cost to all of us.

Expansion of KanCare could ultimately become the deciding factor between long-term availability of local healthcare services for our patients, or the need to travel long distances to receive even the most basic care. The Bridge to a Healthy Kansas Bill has been estimated to increase our annual reimbursements between \$1.7 and \$2 million. Keep in mind these dollars would go to compensate our facility for services already being provided to these patients, most of which are currently being written off to either charity care or bad debt.

Bill 2064 is not a short-term, Band-Aid fix for our facility or the dozens like us across the State; it is a potential life-line. Our facility is fortunate to have an extremely supportive community which has rallied to our financial need through the approval of a one-percent sales tax, generating roughly \$1.6 million for our facility’s debt service. This tax would most likely not have been needed had KanCare been expanded. However without expansion the financial assistance we need, that would have been provided Federally, has fallen on the shoulders of our local citizens.

Many other Kansas hospitals are not as lucky, they have been forced to cut staff, reduce services, and in some cases even close their doors. How many more highly educated and skilled workers must be displaced? How many more physicians must learn to offer fewer tests, fewer procedures, and most likely fewer positive outcomes? And finally how many more Kansas residents must be denied the local availability of even basic healthcare services?

The Bridge to a Healthy Kansas is a fiscally responsible Kansas-based solution that will bring hundreds of millions of our federal tax dollars back home to Kansas – creating jobs, boosting our economy, protecting hospitals and improving the health of Kansans. For these reasons, I support The Bridge to a Healthy Kansas (HB 2064). Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "V. Watson", is written over a horizontal line.

Virgil Watson Jr.
Chief Executive Officer
South Central Kansas Medical Center