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Partners in America's Poverty Fighting Network

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Scott Anglemyer
Kansas Association of Community Action Programs
Testimony in Support of House Bill 2139
House Health and Human Services Committee

Chairman Hawkins and Members of the Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee and to voice support for House Bill 2139. My name is Scott Anglemyer, and I am executive director of the Kansas Association of Community Action Programs (KACAP). KACAP is the membership association for Community Action Agencies in Kansas that are working to create economic opportunity and end poverty in their communities.

Access to health care is an issue that Community Action Agencies often encounter when working with low-income families. Thousands of people in Kansas can't get dental care when and where they need it. The fact is, finding a dentist is tough, especially for those who rely on public health insurance. There's a dental provider shortage in Kansas leaving 87 of our counties unable to keep up with the demand for oral health care. Instead of getting the treatment they need, people live in pain, miss school or work and develop life-threatening infections.

The good news is we already know how to dramatically improve access to dental care: allow dental therapists to perform routine dental care. It's a safe, cost-effective and productive solutions to the crisis.

Mid-level dental providers have been utilized by more than 50 countries for almost a century and are now practicing in Minnesota, Alaska, Oregon, and Washington, and are authorized in Maine and Vermont. In all, more than 20 states are currently considering allowing these health professionals to provide routine and preventive care like cleanings, fillings and some extractions. A 2012 expert review of over 1,000 studies and reports concluded that the quality of care provided by dental therapists within the scope of their role was comparable to that of a dentist – and in some studies was judged superior.

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While studies show conclusively that mid-level dental providers deliver safe, quality care, these workers also boost the economy. They allow dentists to grow their practices and increase revenues while treating more patients. The model creates new, good jobs that offer a career ladder for current dental employees. Finally, by improving the health care options available to employees and their families, implementing mid-level dental helps communities attract new businesses.

Change is never easy. When dental hygienists were introduced in the early part of the last century, organized dentistry opposed them. Likewise, the medical community initially pushed back against physician assistants and nurse practitioners. Now, however, dentists and doctors can't imagine functioning without these skilled team members, and our health care is far better because of it.

We respectfully ask for support of House Bill 2139.