



**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 312  
House Health and Human Services Committee  
March 14, 2018**

**Denise Cyzman, Executive Director, Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved  
Annie McKay, President & CEO, Kansas Action for Children**

Chair Hawkins and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your efforts to ensure every Kansan receives routine, high-quality dental care. The Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved (KAMU) and Kansas Action for Children provide leadership for the Kansas Dental Project, a collaborative effort by Kansas citizens, community leaders, and health care professionals to address the dental workforce shortage and improve access to dental care in rural and underserved areas. **We support Senate Bill 312, which will increase access to dental care by establishing a new type of dental provider – a dental therapist – in Kansas.**

The clinics that KAMU serves provide primary, dental, or behavioral health care – or some combination – to all Kansans regardless of who they are, where they live, how much money they make, or if they have health or dental insurance. Of the 42 member clinics served by KAMU, 30 provide dental services, including three clinics that are solely dedicated to providing dental care. KAMU member clinics are an essential component of the dental delivery system in Kansas. Collectively, they are the largest dental care system that serves uninsured and Medicaid beneficiaries in Kansas. In 2016, these clinics provided dental care to more than 93,000 Kansans. They also treated thousands of children in schools across the state. That sounds impressive, and it is. Sadly, it does not begin to touch the unmet need for oral health care services.

**KAMU member clinics need dental therapists to meet the demand for dental care.** Between 2012 and 2016, these clinics experienced an increase in more than 18,000 dental patients. During that time, the number of dentists employed by the clinics decreased by three FTE positions (although numerous clinics are seeking to fill open positions). Safety net clinic dentists see an average of 2,300 patients annually. Compare that to 1,500 – the optimal number of patients seen by a private practice dentist according to AFTCO Transition Consultants. **KAMU member clinics see the need for increased access to dental care every day and feel the burden of not being able to fully meet that need.** Let us not forget, we are not just talking about numbers here. We are talking about newborns, children, young adults, adults, and senior Kansans. We are talking about the ability of Kansas children to learn and thrive; giving our adults the best chances to be employed; assuring our babies are born healthy; and allowing our seniors to grow old gracefully and with dignity.

The dental therapists authorized by Senate Bill 312 will help KAMU member clinics and private practice dentists serve more Kansans. Dental therapists will work with the supervision of dentists

to perform routine procedures, like drilling and filling cavities. This will free up dentists' time to focus on more complicated procedures. Certain procedures will require direct supervision – the presence of a dentist who personally diagnoses the condition to be treated, authorizes the procedure, and evaluates the dental therapist's performance – for the duration of the dental therapist's career. We anticipate that clinics that can utilize dentists to serve patients in settings outside the dental office will be able to utilize dental therapists' full scope of practice in those settings as well. However, we are mindful that dental therapists authorized by this compromise legislation will be more limited in their ability to deliver necessary care in underserved areas where dentists are not present. This means that long-term care facilities, disability service centers, schools, and other settings that don't have dentists onsite will not realize the full benefit of these new providers' skills, nor will the 14 Kansas counties that do not have a dentist at all.

We look forward to evaluating these new providers and making continued progress in Kansas' journey to improve access to dental care with dental therapists. While not the bill introduced by the Kansas Dental Project, or identical to a successful dental therapy model being leveraged in another state, Kansas will be joining a national movement to increase access to high-quality care for underserved populations with dental therapists. We support Senate Bill 312, and look forward to building on this legislation as states throughout the country establish dental therapists, as educational institutions develop a standardized curriculum, and as health care adopts other advances (like teledentistry) to increase access to care.