



To: Chairwoman Schmidt, Members, Public Health and Welfare Committee

From: Rachel Monger, Vice President of Government Affairs

Date: February 1, 2018

Neutral Testimony on Senate Bill 312

Thank you, Chairwoman and Members of the Committee. I am Rachel Monger, Vice President of Government Affairs for LeadingAge Kansas, the state association for faith-based and nonprofit providers of aging services. We have 160 members across Kansas, which include not-for-profit nursing homes, retirement communities, hospital long-term care units, assisted living, homes plus, housing, low-income housing, home health agencies, home and community based service programs, PACE and Meals on Wheels. Our members serve more than 25,000 elders each day.

Access to routine dental care is an essential health issue for elder Kansans. Most people lose their dental insurance coverage when they retire. Medicare does not cover routine dental care, and only provides a few limited services deemed "medically necessary." Medicaid also no longer covers oral health care for adults, except for "emergency services." Under KanCare, MCOs offer a limited number of preventative dental visits a year. Nursing home residents and elders who are home-bound or disabled often have limited access to dental care. Nursing homes do not employ dental staff, and transportation and access to a dentist's office is often a steep barrier. Nursing home residents in fragile physical health or with advancing stages of dementia often cannot obtain dental care unless a dentist comes to the nursing home and provides care. There are few dentists willing or able to go into a nursing home to perform dental procedures.

Dental therapists provide the opportunity for regular and effective dental treatment for nursing home residents, rather than elders relying on emergency care that may come too late.

However, this opportunity can only be realized if dental therapists are allowed to perform important dental procedures in a nursing home, while under general supervision.

In SB 312 some of the dental procedures that are most needed by elders may only be performed in a dental office, while a dentist is personally on-site supervising patient care before and after their dental procedure. This requirement guarantees that dental therapists will not provide care for elders in much-needed and essential ways.

In order to truly expand access to care for elders in nursing homes, SB 312 must:

- Allow dental therapists to perform all procedures within their scope of practice in settings outside of a dental office. Dental therapists must be able to provide care to residents within the nursing home.
- Allow general supervision of dental therapists practicing within a nursing home. If direct supervision is required, a dentist must be in the nursing home with the dental therapist and overseeing patient care. As we have noted, there are few dentists who will treat in the nursing home. The direct supervision requirement cuts residents off from the important dental procedures they need.

Elders in Kansas represent a large part of the population who struggle to access timely and effective dental care. We respectfully request the Committee to take those needs into account while working on SB 312. Dental therapists must be allowed to enter a nursing home and perform their full scope of practice without a requirement that a dentist be physically on the premises. That is the only way to truly expand access to care for elders, especially in the many rural areas of our state.