

**Senate Committee on Assessment and Taxation
Hearing on Senate Bill 516
March 9, 2010**

Chairman Donovan and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding SB 516. My name is Tanya Dorf Brunner, and I am the Executive Director of Oral Health Kansas. We are a statewide coalition dedicated to improving oral health in Kansas through advocacy, public awareness, and education. We have over 1000 supporters, including dentists, dental hygienists, educators, safety net clinics, charitable foundations, and advocates for children, people with disabilities and older Kansans.

The state of Kansas is in the midst of an unprecedented economic downturn. The loss of \$1 billion over the past year has led to dramatic cuts in critical safety-net services. Some of those services are dental services for people who are on Medicaid. Funding has been eliminated for dental services for pregnant women; people with developmental and physical disabilities, traumatic brain injury; and elderly Kansans. Research shows that people who receive routine dental services are able to manage oral health problems that could lead to more serious and costly health problems, including pneumonia, strokes, and heart conditions. Eliminating preventive dental services has and will cost the state more money in addressing the serious health problems people on Medicaid experience.

Because we believe strongly that preventive dental services need to be a part of the state Medicaid plan, Oral Health Kansas urges the Committee to support the tobacco tax increase contained in SB 516. The waste in state government has been cut already; now we need to generate the necessary revenue to reinstate the vital safety net services that have been slashed as well. This proposed tobacco tax would generate an estimated \$51 million for the State General Fund which could help provide fundamental medical care to meet the basic needs of Kansas citizens.

The Legislature's bold action to implement a statewide smoking ban this year will be bolstered by increasing the taxes on tobacco. These two policy decisions will show our state's dedication to improving the health of all Kansans. Not only will the tobacco tax limit the use of tobacco by many Kansans, but it also will increase the amount of revenue available to meet the needs of thousands of Kansans.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, Kansas currently has one of the lower tobacco tax rates in the country. In 2009, fourteen states had cigarette tax rates of \$2.00 or more. Connecticut and Rhode Island's rates both top \$3.00 per pack. If SB 516 passes, an additional eight states still would have a higher cigarette tax than Kansas.

We urge you to support the tobacco tax. It is the right investment for Kansans at the right time. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony.