

Testimony before the Senate Ways & Means Subcommittee on Department of Health and Environment Budget

January 28, 2004

Provided by: Teresa Schwab, Executive Director
Oral Health Kansas, Inc.

Chairman Adkins and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony to you today regarding the Department of Health and Environment budget. My name is Teresa Schwab, and I am the Executive Director of Oral Health Kansas, Inc.

Oral Health Kansas is a newly established coalition of over 120 organizations and individuals who are committed to improving the oral health status of all Kansans. With support from major contributors, the coalition's advocacy, public education and awareness efforts will focus on prevention, access to oral health care, oral health leadership, oral health status and developing an oral health work force.

According to Oral Health America, Kansas ranks as the 5th worst state in the nation in its commitment to a sound, statewide oral health program. Anecdotal evidence demonstrates that many Kansans find it difficult to access appropriate oral health care, either due to a lack of providers, especially providers who accept Medicaid or HealthWave, or lack of transportation or child care to make scheduled appointments. In addition, many Kansans, especially children, do not have access to effective measures to prevent tooth decay, such as fluoridated water or fluoride varnishes or sealants.

Currently, **Kansas is one of only seven states that do not have a state Dental Director.** We believe this position, housed within the Department of Health and Environment, is critical to bring the leadership necessary to our state in the area of oral health. Tooth decay is the only major infectious disease for which Kansas has no state program, and because of its direct connection to *overall* health, we believe oral health *must* become a priority in this state. **Hiring a Dental Director with the authority to pull together existing resources is the first step in making this happen.**

In the budget he submitted to the Governor, KDHE Secretary Bremby included an allocation of approximately \$173,200 to hire a state Dental Director. Unfortunately, the Dental Director position did not find its way into the Governor's proposed budget. Secretary Bremby's allocation included a \$50,000 private grant from the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund as well as another \$50,000 federal grant through Maternal Child Health in the Department of Health and Human Services. That leaves approximately \$73,200 in state general fund dollars.

For many of the reasons listed above, **Oral Health Kansas believes it is necessary for our state to hire a Dental Director to place a much-needed and much-lacking emphasis on oral health care.** We believe a Dental Director would be someone with the authority to do the following for the state of Kansas:

- Develop and implement programs and policies for the **prevention of oral disease.**
- **Coordinate public/private partnerships** to accomplish such things as increasing the number of dental seats in neighboring states or coordinating loan forgiveness programs for dental professionals.
- Assist communities to **attract and retain dental health professionals**, especially in public health settings.
- Provide the leadership capacity necessary to make our state eligible for significant **private and federal grant opportunities.**
- **Link programs, services and data** necessary to improve the oral health of all Kansans.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide you with this testimony today. I have attached to my testimony a list of our Coalition members so that you may see the variety of organizations and individuals who are committed to this issue.

I would be happy to stand for questions.

Respectfully submitted,
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