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**Senate Public Health & Welfare Committee
March 23, 2021**

Chairman Hilderbrand and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of HB 2114. My name is Tanya Dorf Brunner, and I am the Executive Director at Oral Health Kansas. We are the state's consumer oral health advocacy organization, and our mission is to improve oral health for all Kansans through advocacy, public awareness, and education. We currently have over 1600 supporters throughout the state who share our vision to ensure Kansans have access to dental providers and a way to pay for dental services.

HB 2114

Oral Health Kansas is pleased to see the proposal to establish a Senior Care Task Force in HB 2114. We support the need to focus attention on the health, social, and emotional needs of older adults. The needs are significant, and this Task Force offers the opportunity for a systemic look at the services and supports needed to ensure people can age with dignity and in the best health possible.

Last year the Kansas Health Institute produced a study of the dental insurance status of Kansans. The study showed that less than half of Kansans over age 65 have dental insurance.¹ We also know that 1 out of 7 older Kansans has lost all their teeth.²

Dental care can seem like a routine and easily attainable service for most of us to use. It gets harder to access as people get older and lose access to dental insurance. It is also famously difficult to access dental care in long-term care facilities. Many facilities work very hard to help their residents get dental care, including bringing in dental hygienists and dentists if they can. The current systems of care and reimbursement models conspire to make these services difficult to set up and sustain. A 2017 report from the Centers for Disease Control stated, "Because Medicare does not cover routine dental care, older adults may have trouble accessing appropriate dental care."³

Dental care is an important part of health care, and older people who can maintain their oral health through routine care are able to stay healthier longer. Dental diseases are associated with risks of heart disease, diabetes, and pneumonia. But dental diseases are entirely preventable and maintaining good oral health can help older adults stave off chronic conditions.

We applaud the plan to establish the Senior Care Task Force and urge the group to include access to healthcare and dental care, as well as the connection between oral and overall health, as they take up topics of study. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony in favor of HB 2114. We urge the committee to pass the bill.

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¹ Kansas Health Institute: "Dental Insurance Coverage and Unmet Dental Needs in Kansas," November 2020, <http://oralhealthkansas.org/DentalInsuranceReport.html>

² Oral Health Kansas: "Kansas Oral Health Report Card 2021," January 2021, <http://oralhealthkansas.org/pdf/2021%20Oral%20Health%20Report%20Card.pdf>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: "Dental Care Among Adults Aged 65 and Over, 2017" Brief published in May 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db337.htm>