



12 West Jackson Avenue

Iola, Kansas 66749

February 10, 2017

Rep. Daniel Hawkins, Chair
House Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Chairman Hawkins,

Thrive Allen County is a nonprofit organization located in Iola that focuses on improving health, wellness, recreation and education conditions in our county. Our vision is that Allen County will become the healthiest rural county in Kansas, and we do this through supporting and encouraging programs, policies and resources that promote access to healthcare, healthy lifestyles and positive community conversation. This testimony is submitted in support of House Bill 2139—the establishment of licensed dental therapists in Kansas.

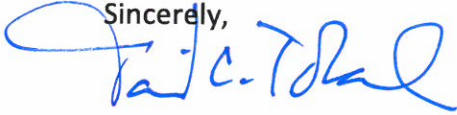
As an organization that works intensively “on the ground” in rural Southeast Kansas we have seen firsthand the need for better dental access in our county. IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO RECRUIT DENTISTS TO OUR COMMUNITY. We know this because we are the primary recruitment arm for dental and medical providers in Allen County. In that capacity we have seen over and over again what a struggle it is to convince dentists to move to—and stay in—our community. Having licensed dental therapists would significantly improve access to dental care in our county, and particularly improve access for low and moderate income residents.

For every dentist in our county, we have 2,152 residents—an overwhelming ratio that creates a barrier for members of our community to make appointments. The addition of even one licensed dental therapist in our community would allow for an additional 2,000 more appointments annually, greatly alleviating the burden on our local dentists. Adding a dental therapist frees up our dentists to focus on more complex procedures, allowing the entire dental team to operate more efficiently.

The lack of access to dental care affects our entire community, but those most impacted are our most vulnerable—senior citizens, people with disabilities and children. The inability to make an appointment in a timely matter, long wait times once in the dental office, and cost are all issues that can be alleviated with the addition of licensed dental therapists.

Thrive believes that allowing the licensing of dental therapists in the state of Kansas will better our community's health and well-being, easing access issues that our community is currently facing with a shortage of dentists in our county. We support House Bill 2139 and encourage you to do so.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David C. Toland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "T".

David C. Toland
CEO

CC: Brian D. Wolfe, MD
Thrive Chairman