

Testimony in Support of SB69

Thank you, Chairman Pilcher-Cook and members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of SB69. My name is Michelle Knowles. I have been a Registered Nurse for 34 years and a Primary Care Family Nurse Practitioner for 20 years. I live and work in Hays, Kansas.

Kansas is on the verge of a health care crisis. We don't have enough physicians and the advanced practice registered nurses are trying to work with outdated barriers in the way. According to the 2014 Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Primary Care Health Professional Underserved Areas Report, Kansas has 92 out of 105 counties that are underserved for primary care. Mental Health is even worse, 101 out of 105 counties. Compared to the 2013 report, Kansas lost 161 primary care physicians in the underserved counties. When physicians leave, it also affects advanced practice nurses. Currently, advanced practice nurses can't continue seeing patients until we have a new collaborative agreement signed with another physician. Access to care is threatened. Advanced practice nurses have to work to find another physician to sign an agreement so they can continue to provide care in their communities. If they can't find a new physician, they may have to relocate and the community suffers. In underserved areas, it is becoming more difficult to find physicians to sign collaborative agreements for several reasons. It is difficult to recruit physicians to underserved areas. Some physicians are choosing to not sign agreements. More physicians are becoming employed by organizations that don't allow physicians to sign agreements with advanced practice nurses not working for that same organization. Advanced practice nurses are searching farther and farther, many times from 30 to 200 miles away to get an agreement signed. It is unnecessary. There are no studies supporting the concept that collaborative agreements improve care. On the contrary, they restrict access to health care. According to the Board of Nursing Annual FY 2013 report, Kansas already has advanced practice nurses living in all but 7 of the underserved counties. Advanced practice nurses need to be able to continue providing health care to Kansans, even if a physician leaves a community. The majority of you know the struggles in the underserved areas, because you represent many of the underserved counties. I think only 2 of you don't have any underserved counties in your districts.

The federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) estimates that more than 35.2 million people living within the 5,870 Health Professional Shortage Areas nationwide do not currently receive adequate primary care services. The need for health care is greater than the available services. We are all aware of the physician shortage. The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis predicts a shortage of as high as 20,400 physicians by 2020. According to the March 2014 National Resident Matching Program, the data show that there were only 19 more US graduate matches to primary care specialties than in 2013. Looking at the entire first year match numbers for all specialties, only 12% were primary care matches. In contrast, the American Association

of Nurse Practitioners reported over 85% of the graduating nurse practitioners are in primary care.

In 19 states and Washington DC, an advanced practice nurse is able to work fully under their own license. These states authorize advanced practice nurses to practice to the full extent of their education and certification. New Mexico and Colorado are two of these states. New Mexico is already actively recruiting advanced practice nurses from Kansas, and Colorado has pulled graduates from western Kansas. Kansas is losing advanced practice nurses to other states and we can't afford it. Unfortunately, it will continue to get worse, because advanced practice nurses are in great demand. We need to keep our health care workforce in Kansas. After Arizona passed their full practice authority bill, the number of licensed nurse practitioners in the state increased 52% over the 5 years after implementation. The largest percentage increase occurred in the rural counties.

Advanced practice nurses offer over 4,000 solutions to the health care crisis in Kansas. There are over 25 years of studies that confirm advanced practice nurses provide effective, high-quality, safe care. There are no scientific reasons to oppose removing the collaborative agreement. Even the Institute of Medicine has studied the research and concluded that government-mandated restrictions need to be removed.

To conclude, the demand for access to health care will continue to grow, especially in the rural and urban underserved areas of Kansas. SB69 helps find a real solution to improve access to health care for Kansas citizens. Advanced practice nurses will be able to effectively care for more people, especially in the underserved areas of Kansas.

I thank the committee for your time today and ask that you please consider supporting SB69.

Respectfully,

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