

ROOKS COUNTY



HEALTH CENTER

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Testimony re: HB 2279
Senate Public Health & Welfare Committee
AJ Thomas, DPT Rooks County Health Center CEO
March 18, 2021

Senator Richard Hilderbrand and committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee in support of HB 2279, providing for Kansas to join the Physical Therapy compact. I will be brief with my testimony, not for lack of emphasis, but as an understanding of the strain on time you all have in service to Kansas.

As the Chief Executive Officer of a Critical Access Hospital in Plainville, Kansas I cannot overstress the difficulty I come across in finding healthcare professionals to move to rural Kansas. Entire service lines can be temporarily suspended based on the lack of one professional. This can be detrimental to the health and wellness of the residents of Kansas. In the case of Physical Therapy services, this can impact quality of life and function in a rural community. Before I became the CEO at RCH I took over the rehabilitation director position which had sat vacant for 6 months. In these six months the hospital was not able to provide consistent therapy services for their outpatients and inpatients. We all know delays in therapy care can lead to increased length of stay and increased mortality. Months after I became the CEO, our lead physical therapist went out on maternity leave. Due to the delays in licensing in Kansas it wound up being easier for me to serve in dual roles of CEO and PT than to try and find a traveling therapist to fill in the role. We found that any delay in licensure could have lasted longer than the maternity leave itself. If the compact was in place, we would have easily been able to utilize professionals from Nebraska or Colorado to help us through the time period.

As a Board Certified Sports Physical Therapist, I also find myself as the team Physical Therapist for Fort Hays State University Athletics. I am constantly conflicted when I travel with the team across state lines. If care is needed, I may be the most qualified individual however, without a compact, I place myself at undue risk in caring for the student athletes. There are many other therapists in Kansas that find themselves in the same position as they travel with college, high school, and club teams. The Sports Medicine Licensure Clarity Act of 2018 helped to clarify the role of the medical professional traveling with a team. However, if a student athlete from the opposing team is injured a compact would allow me to utilize my skill set to provide medical assistance without fear of lack of state licensure when crossing state lines.

I urge the committee to pass forward HB 2279 with recommendation assisting our rural hospitals and serving the residents of Kansas. Delays in care lead to impaired health and function. Passing this bill out of committee will increase the ability to recruit therapists which will improve the health and wellness of Kansas.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AJ Thomas'.

Anthony Thomas PT, DPT
CEO Rooks County Health Center