



To: Gene Suellentrop, Chair
Public Health and Welfare Committee

From: Don King, Senior Vice President, Ascension Health
CEO and Kansas Ministry Market Executive, Ascension Via Christi

Date: January 21 2020

Subject: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 252

Thank you Chairman Suellentrop and members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee for allowing Ascension Via Christi to provide this testimony. My name is Don King and I am the CEO of Ascension Via Christi in Wichita, Kansas. Today, Ascension has 2,600 care sites in 20 states and the District of Columbia. Ascension Via Christi is the largest healthcare system in our state with more than 6,100 employees and serves Kansas through our nine owned or co-owned hospitals, physician clinics, and outpatient ancillary and retail (home based services).

We provide over \$360 million in wages and salaries to our associates, resulting in \$12.6 million in state taxes withheld. In FY 2018, we provided \$68.8 million in community benefit, which includes \$27.8 million in charity care and \$16.8 million in unpaid costs of Medicaid services.

On behalf of Ascension Via Christi, I want to thank Governor Laura Kelly and Senate Majority Leader Jim Denning for their efforts in drafting a bipartisan bill that expands our state's Medicaid program, KanCare, in a manner that both provides much needed health coverage and appropriate health care to our most vulnerable Kansans in a fiscally responsible manner. Expanding access to health care to an additional 150,000 Kansans is in keeping with our mission and shared responsibility to serve all persons with special attention to those who are poor and vulnerable and to protect and promote the inherent dignity of all human life from conception to natural death.

We are confident that bringing approximately \$900 million of our federal tax dollars back home to Kansas annually – will create jobs, boost our economy, and reduce the amount of charity care and uncompensated care our hospitals across the state currently provide. More importantly, it will improve the health of Kansans.

While we acknowledge that expanding KanCare will not solve all the challenges facing our state's health care delivery system, we believe it does provide an opportunity to transform our mental health and substance abuse treatment model and rural health care.

It is important to Ascension Via Christi that our state take the necessary measures to maintain access to healthcare in our rural communities. SB 252 includes a provision for establishing a rural hospital transformation program to support rural hospitals and their communities. It includes identifying new delivery models, strategic partnerships and implementing financial and delivery system reforms. Because this bill encourages implementation of strategies designed to preserve rural healthcare

services, we are hopeful that the additional financial resources generated will provide our rural healthcare partners the time and flexibility to best serve their communities.

The current crisis in the state of Kansas' mental healthcare system creates a less-than-ideal environment and significant safety issues for patients and staff. Currently, we have patients sitting in our emergency rooms for multiple days before they can be transferred to the state hospital in Osawatomie. Many of these patients are either uninsured or covered by Medicaid. We are asking for your support to create a higher level of attention and discussion around this issue that will ultimately lead to action from both a policy and financial standpoint. We believe expanding KanCare would go a long way in providing the additional financial resources needed to address the challenges of our mental health system.

For these reasons, we ask for your support of Senate Bill 252. Thank you for your consideration of my comments.