

Making Elder Care Better Since 1975

Kansas Advocates
for
Better Care



Founded in 1975 as *Kansans for Improvement of Nursing Homes* by concerned citizens like you.

February 3, 2014

RE: 2372/Fluoride in water
House Health & Human Services

Chairman Crum and members of the House Health & Human Services Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to offer our comments on HB 2372. Kansas Advocates for Better Care is a not-for-profit organization, beholden to no commercial interests and is supported almost entirely by donations from citizens who support our mission of improving the quality of care in all long-term settings. KABC was among a handful of non-profit consumer advocacy groups which worked to win passage of the Nursing Home Reform Act of 1987.

Advocating for oral health and dental services for seniors is a priority issue for KABC. We are a member of the The Dental Project and the current Dental Champions Leadership Program hosted by Oral Health Kansas. KABC opposes HB 2372 because it is poor public policy to require cities and other local governments to publish erroneous and misleading information to their citizens which could result in Kansas communities eliminating fluoride from their drinking water.

Today's seniors are a shining example of how well preventive dental services and public education works. As a result of a sustained preventative approach to oral health, starting in childhood, the proportion of persons 65 years of age and older who have lost all their teeth has significantly declined, particularly among elders still living independently. A lifetime of drinking fluoridated water has contributed to this improved oral health.

Oral health is a key component of an older person's overall general health, well-being and quality of life, but is often overlooked as part of their holistic health care. Not only are oral health problems painful if left untreated, they can complicate a person's ability to speak, chew and swallow. Those resulting difficulties often manifest in poor nutrition, weight loss, an increased susceptibility to infections and impact other systemic health conditions. These health problems too often result in the loss of dignity, self-esteem, self-confidence and a poorer general quality of life.

A generation of prevention, regular dental care and fluoridated water has proven that oral diseases and tooth loss are not an inevitable aspect of aging. Study after study over the past 60 years show that water fluoridation contributes much more to overall health than simply reducing dental decay: it prevents needless infection, pain, suffering and loss of teeth; improves the quality of life and saves vast sums of money in dental treatment costs. Additionally, fluoridation conserves natural tooth structure by preventing the need for initial fillings and subsequent replacement fillings.

Requiring local governments to promote incorrect information to consumers is not good public health policy. It needlessly alarms consumers, advances a scientific fallacy and threatens the long-term oral and dental health of Kansans of all ages. For these reasons, we oppose HB 2372 and ask that you do not pass it out of this committee.

Mitzi E. McFatrach, Executive Director
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