

Testimony Presented To The Joint Committee on Health Policy Oversight

Lawless Barrientos: Comfort Dental

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My name is Lawless Barrientos and I appear before you today on behalf of Comfort Dental. Comfort Dental is based out of Lakewood, Colorado and was founded by Dr. Rick Kushner in 1977. Dr. Kushner pioneered the concept of accessible, fair-priced dentistry. There are Comfort Dental practices in 7 states currently, including Colorado, Wyoming, Kentucky, New Mexico, Missouri, Ohio and Texas. It is critically important to note that Comfort Dental practices are privately owned and operated by dentists who are licensed in the states in which they practice. Comfort Dental practices epitomize the "family-friendly" concept.

- Collectively, Comfort Dental dentists see 1,500,000 patients per year. The Comfort Dental franchise has over 78 private practices and 286 partner dentists. Comfort Dental's mission is to provide quality, affordable dental care to all economic classes.
- Comfort Dental improves access by having extended office hours and 24-hour emergency access (Regular business hours generally are: Monday-Friday, 7:30 AM to 7:30 PM, Saturdays, 7:30 AM to 1:30 PM).
- Comfort Dental prices tend to be 40-60% lower than the average private practice dentist. Comfort Dental dentists make a point to go over dental prices and options with patients. Prices of dental procedures and care are posted to the consumer.
- The average dental Medicaid provider is well below the national average in Kansas. Comfort Dental is one of the largest Medicaid providers in Colorado. On average, Comfort Dental Private Practice Dentists treat approximately 40% under-insured/Un-insured, 20% Medicaid and CHIP +.

It is the success, and high-quality of Comfort Dental's family-friendly dental practice concept that has piqued the interest of several Kansas communities and licensed Kansas dentists who are interested in opening a Comfort Dental office in Kansas. With me today is Dr. Craig Bahr and Dr. Matt Draper. Dr. Matt Draper lives in Kansas along with several other Comfort Dental dentists, but they have to drive over the state line to practice in Missouri. They would like to open up a Comfort Dental practice in Kansas. We have worked closely with them in an effort to open a practice in Kansas, without success. I have also attached a letter to my testimony from the city of Colby who reached out to us in hopes of attracting an affordable, Medicaid-focused dental practice to their rural community.

As we attempted to work with the Kansas Dental Board to establish a Comfort Dental practice, we were disappointed that their interpretation of current law prohibits such a practice. We grew increasingly frustrated when there seemed to be at best, disinterest from the Dental Board in working with us to solve the problem, and at worst, hostility. In short, we were told to *"go to the legislature and change the law."*

So with some help from John Federico and his staff, that is what we will attempt to do in the 2011 Legislative Session. There is an obvious need to attract more dentists to Kansas. There is an even greater need to attract dentists who are willing to take Medicaid patients. We feel strongly that local communities and most importantly the consumer would benefit greatly from a dental practice owned and operated by highly-trained licensed dentists which embrace transparency in their pricing and maintains extended weekday and weekend hours.

At a time when young dentists leave dental school with tremendous debt, limiting their options to own their own dental practice, a franchise ownership arrangement offers an attractive option for them that we thought would be welcomed by the dental community and the regulating agency.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to visit briefly with you today. Comfort Dental, in the worst way, wants to be part of the solution to the very-real dental shortage issue in Kansas. I look forward to working with you in the upcoming Session. I am happy to stand for any questions you might have.