Testimony from
Ryan Spaulding, PhD
Director, Center for Telemedicine and Telehealth
KU Medical Center
before the
Vision 2020 Committee
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Good afternoon Chairman Sloan, members of the committee. My name is Ryan Spaulding and I am the Director of the Center for Telemedicine and Telehealth at the University of Kansas Medical Center.

As you may recall from last year’s briefings, the Center has been active in telemedicine in Kansas for 19 years, not only providing telemedicine services but also conducting research and serving as a telehealth resource for interested stakeholders in Kansas, other states and even other countries. In these service and resource roles, we have become familiar with the many ways that telemedicine can benefit rural patients and local communities. We have also become aware of the many issues that either advance or hinder telemedicine growth.

Last year we provided clinical telehealth services to over 5,000 patients and family members in Kansas, including consultations in TeleCardiology, TeleKidcare (pediatrics), TeleMental Health, TeleOncology, TeleStroke and many other specialties. With two of our latest federal projects, we will be providing telehealth services for children with epilepsy and older Kansans in both nursing homes and correctional facilities. We also are involved in a home telehealth monitoring project in Coffeyville and expect home telehealth to expand rapidly nationwide. In addition, it is our understanding that Stormont Vail in Topeka is also now implementing a telemedicine program. In short, there are many telehealth activities taking place in Kansas and we have recently seen a great deal of interest and excitement surrounding telemedicine. We truly believe that this is just the beginning of a more rapid advancement of the field, partly driven by the ability of telemedicine to provide health care access and to help address health professional shortages, while also providing economic benefits to patients and community hospitals.

Over the years we have worked on many telehealth challenges, and perhaps the most consistent challenge has been to achieve uniform insurance coverage for telemedicine. Medicare, Medicaid and some private insurers reimburse for telemedicine; and Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Kansas has been a national leader in telemedicine coverage. However, not all insurers cover telehealth and sometimes the policies are not clear. This makes it confusing for providers and patients to engage in telehealth. We know from experience that insurance coverage for telemedicine is not a driver of telemedicine activity but lack of coverage can certainly be a barrier. Thus, the KU Center for Telemedicine and Telehealth supports efforts that increase access and clarity to telehealth services for Kansans in their home communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee, I’ll be pleased to answer any questions.