

**Testimony: Opposition to Kansas Neurological Institute
Senate Public Health & Welfare Committee**

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**By: Christy Caldwell, Vice President Government Relations
Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce
ccaldwell@topekachamber.org**

Chairwoman Schmidt, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding the proposed closure of KNI in Topeka.

KNI is a shining example of the state's compassionate care of 156 very fragile Kansas citizens who live in group homes within, what was once, a state institution here in Topeka. Eighty-eight percent of the population living at KNI are profoundly disabled, many with multiple disabilities. These sons and daughters of Kansas residents have come to KNI from all regions of the state, (actually there are 31 counties represented). There is no doubt their care is expensive; their needs are 24/7 and sometimes they require immediate special attention. Without the high quality care provided by KNI, we are concerned for their future.

The proposed 2012 budget mandates they be absorbed into community care somewhere within the state over time. The Topeka Chamber is very concerned that there are not enough locations that have a full array of services necessary to support these fragile people. We are being told that moving residents out of KNI will save the state money. Yet, we have those who indicate quality housing and services for clients with such significant needs are not currently available. To replicate what now exists at KNI will certainly be very costly.

Most residents have lived in their KNI home for many years and relate to those who care for them as family members. Deliberations to force them from their home, is devastating to their families and guardians. We understand none of the committees reviewing this issue have been provided a list of facilities with available space, appropriate specialized equipment and quality trained staff for KNI residents? We are not convinced such housing is readily available here or throughout the state and believe this proposal will only result in cost shifts to provide what is already existing at KNI, we doubt there will be any cost savings.

These fragile Kansans need care around the clock; they need specialized medical & dental care, they need appropriate transportation, special equipment, equipment maintenance, appropriate food and special means to provide nourishment. KNI has such medical services, equipment, and transportation; we are not convinced community-based facilities have this level of care available without significant new spending.

KNI staff is provided specific training to serve the needs of their residents, with that training their wages are \$12.35/hour and they receive a full range of benefits. Community-based services are reported to hire workers at \$8.83/hour with limited benefits. Training provided is not at the same level provided to KNI workers. We are concerned with the lack of appropriate training and the the turnover rate at community-based facilities. This trained staff is already available at KNI for residents who have spent much of their adult lives with staff they now consider family.

At a hearing before the House Budget Committee, advocates for community-based placement of KNI residents drew a comparison of the potential closure of KNI to the closure of Winfield in the late 1990's. We listened to testimony regarding a study conducted over a ten year period. This study indicated persons removed from Winfield and placed in the community had significant improvement in their quality of life and health. What was not related to the House Committee was that KNI residents had comparable or even higher quality of life and health improvements during the same 10-year study period and have continued to show progress.

The Topeka Chamber commissioned an economic impact analysis of KNI on Topeka, for the State Closure Commission in 2009. This study was completed by Impact Data Source, Austin, TX. It is attached to my testimony.

KNI had a significant impact on the Topeka area economy during FY 2010. KNI's revenues and expenditures and its employees and their salaries provide direct economic activity. In addition, this activity ripples through the area's economy supporting indirect benefits including sales at local businesses and organizations, as well as indirect jobs and salaries. There are three methods highlighted below. Loss of KNI will have a significant impact on this community, including effectively increasing the unemployment rate and the need for state services to assist these employees and their families. We doubt this consequence has been computed into the savings the state is expecting to realize.

- The estimated direct economic impact KNI had on your capital city's economy, in FY 2010, was \$28 million. The direct revenues of KNI, spending and the spending of its workers generated another \$37 million in sales or economic output in area businesses and other organizations. In total the economic impact of KNI in FY 2010 was \$66 million.
- While the Institute employs 570 individuals, KNI's spending and the spending of its workers support another 741 jobs in this community. In total, the Institute supports 1,311 area jobs.
- Similarly, while the salaries and other payroll cost of the Institute's employee totaled \$27 million in FY 2010, KNI's spending and the spending of its workers supported another \$35.2 million in salaries for workers in related spin-off jobs supported in the area. Therefore the total salaries and other payroll costs supported by KNI during 2010 was a total \$62.3 million. (Three copies of the analysis have been made available to the chair of the committee.)

If the motive for closing KNI is saving the state dollars, we respectfully ask your very careful consideration of whether there are real cost savings or cost shifts. We ask that you listen to those who know the residents of KNI the best – their families, care-givers and the medical community. The Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce urges your decision to be that KNI group homes and support services continue to serve our state's most needy.

Thank You