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**HB 15**

January 28, 2020

**TO:** Members of the House Ways and Means Committee

**FROM:** Nicholas Blendy, Deputy Director, Mayor's Office of Government Relations

**RE:** House Bill 15 – Public Schools – Student Health – Certificate of Dental Health

**POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair Kaiser, Vice-Chair Washington, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 15. HB 15 requires students in public elementary and secondary schools to obtain a certificate of dental health each year, beginning with the 2022-2023 school year, among other provisions.

In the past 20 years, Maryland has made major strides and has become a national leader in the improvement of children's oral health. The majority of Maryland's public school children have no unmet dental needs and less than 1% have any type of urgent need. Maryland children 6-9 years old have less caries experience, less untreated decay, and more tooth protection in the form of dental sealants than found with the Healthy People 2020 objectives for the same measures at the national level.<sup>1</sup> For children 3-5 years old in Maryland's Head Start, the prevalence of untreated decay is lower than the Healthy People 2020 objective of 21%.<sup>2</sup>

The improvements are a result of improved access to oral health care, more preventive oral health programs, statewide oral health literacy campaigns, and higher levels of community awareness. In spite of these great strides, dental caries still remain the most common chronic disease of children and adolescents ages 6-19 years.<sup>3</sup>

Fortunately, access to dental care for low income, uninsured Baltimore City schoolchildren has increased significantly from a few dental Medicaid providers. The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) provides these services directly, as do some local general

<sup>1</sup> MD. Oral Health Plan 2018-2023; "Oral Health Status in Maryland," p.9.

<sup>2</sup> MD. Oral Health Plan 2018-2023; "Oral Health Status in Maryland – Children," p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> "Oral Health Status in Maryland," p.9.



dentists and dental offices—including federally qualified health centers—child focused dental practices, mobile dental practices, and school vendors. Moreover, the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act increased access even further by including pediatric oral health care as one of its 10 essential benefits.

Moreover, with the improved awareness of how significant oral health is to one's total health and wellbeing, health practitioners and educators have successfully encouraged parents to seek dental care early and continuously during a child's development. Twenty years ago, the lack of dental access to low income and/or uninsured children would have posed a burden for a significant number of City children to comply with a dental health certificate requirement, much like the mandate included in HB 15. Thankfully, since then, this burden has been decreased considerably, and HB 15 will assist Baltimore City in helping assess, prevent, and correct dental health problems in our children.

For these reasons, we request a **favorable** report on House Bill 15.