



## Maryland Community Health System

**Committee:** Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

**Bill Number:** Senate Bill 334 – Higher Education - Maryland Dent-Care Program – Eligibility

**Hearing Date:** February 14, 2024

**Position:** Support

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Maryland Community Health System (MCHS) supports Senate Bill 334 – *Higher Education - Maryland Dent-Care Program - Eligibility*. This bill expands the eligibility for the Maryland Dent-Care Program to include part-time dentists and dental hygienists who are practicing under a general or limited license; and authorizing the Office of Student Financial Assistance within the Maryland Higher Education Commission, in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health, to establish prorated loan repayment assistance for part-time dentists and dental hygienists.

Maryland Community Health System (MCHS) is a network of federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) that serve underserved communities in urban, suburban, and rural areas across Maryland. FQHC dental clinics are major components of the dental safety net system, providing essential oral healthcare services to underserved populations. Building and expanding dental clinics and retaining dental providers within existing FQHCs is an important strategy to bridge the gap between medical and dental services offered by FQHCs.

Expanding loan repayment assistance to qualified part-time dentists and dental hygienists will help address the dental provider shortage. With the rising demand for dental services, it is crucial to have a sufficient number of dental hygienists to meet patient needs. By offering loan repayment assistance, dental practices can incentivize part-time dental hygienists to stay in the field and contribute to the overall oral health of the population.

MCHS supports this bill because it will help federally qualified health centers recruit and retain dental providers and meet the needs of our patients. We ask for a favorable report. If we can provide further information, please contact Robyn Elliott at [relliott@policypartners.net](mailto:relliott@policypartners.net).