



**TESTIMONY TO THE HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**

**HB 1143: Dental Services- Dental Hygienists in Schools and School-Based Health Centers and the Maryland Collaborative to Improve Children’s Oral Health Through School-Based Programs**

**POSITION: Support**

**BY: Linda Kohn, President**

**DATE: March 7, 2025**

**The League of Women Voters believes that every Maryland resident should have access to affordable, equitable, quality health care, including dental care.** The League supports community and government programs that promote the well-being and ensure the safety of all children.

Untreated oral disease can lead to systemic infections, which can have serious and even fatal consequences. This was sadly shown by the tragic death of Deamonte Driver: a twelve-year old Maryland boy who in 2007 died due to an untreated tooth abscess after the infection spread to his brain. **House Bill 1143 hopes to address the serious dental health problems that continue to affect Maryland children by establishing a collaborative task force to study and make recommendations how to improve access to dental services through school-based dental programs.**

While dental care is free for children enrolled in Medicaid and MCHP (Maryland Children’s Health Plan), not all Maryland children receive that care in a timely manner. **Screenings and treatment can be delayed or denied due to problems navigating the health care system. Families can face language barriers, administrative complexities, transportation issues, and ongoing difficulties finding providers who accept Medicaid.**

School or school-based dental programs, staffed in part by dental hygienists, can provide improved access to preventive and screening services, often in a comfortable and familiar setting. Further dental care, if needed, would be arranged by the program’s staff, thus circumventing many of the administrative barriers which in the past could have limited access to that care.

**The League of Women Voters Maryland urges a favorable report on House Bill 1143.**

