

FAVORABLE
House Bill 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 Services

House Health and Government Operations Committee
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The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 1143, which would create an interdisciplinary collaborative to consider how school-based dental programs can address the decline in access to children’s oral health services.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland’s public schools, teaching and preparing our almost 900,000 students so they can pursue their dreams. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3-million-member National Education Association (NEA).

According to the Maryland Department of Health’s Annual Oral Health Legislative Reports, the percentage of children with Medicaid who accessed preventative dental services increased from about 50% in 2008 to 64% in 2015. Progress plateaued during the 2016-2019 period with about 63-64% of children receiving preventative dental services under Medicaid. The numbers plummeted during COVID and have yet to rebound at just 56% of children obtaining preventative dental services in Medicaid in 2023¹.

This decline is alarming. House Bill 1143 presents an opportunity for the state to assess public health strategies that can address these challenges and enhance access to oral healthcare for children through school-based programs.

¹ <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/oralhealth/Pages/Annual-Legislative-Reports.aspx>

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recognizes that school-based oral health services can significantly improve healthcare access, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, by providing preventive and treatment services directly in schools². Additionally, such programs contribute to overall health and well-being, as oral health is integral to general health and quality of life. School-based initiatives also support skills-based health education, helping students, teachers, and parents better understand the factors that influence health and empowering them to make informed choices for lifelong well-being.

By strengthening school-based dental programs, Maryland can expand access to preventive care and connect families with long-term dental care solutions.

We urge the committee to issue a Favorable Report on House Bill 1143.

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<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6901974/#:~:text=First%2C%20school%2Dbased%20oral%20health,from%20disadvantaged%20communities%20and%20families.>