



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

1/15/2021

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 368 – Task Force on Oral Health in Maryland**

It has been almost 14 years since Maryland tragically lost one of its youngest citizens to a bacterial infection that started in a tooth. Since then, we have made numerous positive changes that have helped even more Marylanders access dental care.

However, since the onset of the pandemic, the incidences of dental visits among all Marylanders has decreased for many reasons, including fear of the virus and economic hardship. The short- and long-term effects of COVID-19 on the dental health of Marylanders and how to overcome these issues needs to be aggressively addressed.

While there has been substantial progress in ensuring that our youngest have good oral health care, we need to give an equal amount of attention to boost the oral health of our vulnerable adult populations. The barriers to providing access to this care have been exasperated by the pandemic--we must aggressively find solutions now.

This legislation will help us get to the bottom of why people may fall through the cracks and not receive oral health care. It's hard not to ignore this problem when you consider that 15 Maryland adults died of dental cellulitis in our hospitals between 2013 and 2016.

This legislation will create a task force that will perform an extensive two-year study of the barriers to dental care in context of COVID-19. The task force will:

- Be composed of members of the oral health community, consumer advocacy organizations and others,
- Be led by the Dean of the University of Maryland School of Dentistry and the Deputy Secretary of public Health Services,
- Analyze the impact of and identify solutions to barriers to dental care, and
- Report recommendations to the General Assembly by Dec. 1, 2022.

If we understand the access to care issues facing our fellow citizens, we can better treat the dental diseases facing these populations, rather than merely treating the symptoms with pain killers and opiates. Getting people into regular care with a dentist can help keep them out of the emergency room, healthy, and keep our fiscal house in line. The type of thorough analysis under this bill is absolutely critical to help us ensure that all Marylanders receive the best care dentistry can provide.

Thank you and I ask for a favorable report on HB 368.