



The Honorable Shane Pendergrass
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
House Office Building, Room 240
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 710 – MARYLAND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE
PROGRAMS – DENTAL PROVIDERS AND DENTAL STUDENTS - REIMBURSEMENT

Benevis is a dental support organization providing non-clinical support services to dentist offices in Maryland. Benevis is dedicated to its mission to improve access to dentistry by providing the highest quality non-clinical services to some of the nation's leading dental practices. In Maryland, the nine dental practices Benevis supports specialize in providing Medicaid dental services. Those practices are one of the largest providers of Medicaid dental services in the state, providing just under 20% of the Medicaid services statewide and approximately 40% of the Medicaid services in the Baltimore City region. In order to continue this service, these practices must be able to attract high quality dental practitioners with a passion for Medicaid service, and for that reason Benevis supports House Bill 710.

House Bill 710 requires Medicaid to reimburse a dental provider for services rendered by a student of dentistry who is engaged in a qualifying educational program at a school of dentistry and providing services under the supervision of a licensed dentist. The origin of the bill comes from Medicaid dental providers in Maryland seeking to build up the pipeline of dental practitioners working with Medicaid populations by partnering with dental schools to provide hands-on externship opportunities in the State. Unfortunately, when these providers sought to create this type of externship opportunity, they ran into barriers due to limitations in current law that permit only licensed dentists, excluding supervised dental students, from performing or being reimbursed for such services under the State's Medicaid program.

HB710, by opening the door for students to participate in externships at dental practices that specialize in Medicaid, helps increase exposure to Medicaid services for dental students and incentivizes those students to go on to careers that serve those same populations. Additionally, because the vast majority of Medicaid dental patients in Maryland are children, it also increases student exposure to pediatric services. This Committee, along with other health policymakers in Maryland, has made great strides in increasing awareness and access to Medicaid dental services, but it is essential ensure that the practitioners are there to provide those services.

In the best of times, it is difficult to attract new dentists to Medicaid service due to lower reimbursement rates, low patient show rates, and stricter accreditation and administration requirements. This has only gotten worse during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the increased cost of unreimbursed personal protective equipment (PPE), even lower patient show rates, and

reduced services to allow for new public health protocols. The number of practitioners seeking to provide Medicaid care is decreasing while the economic crisis and lack of access to dental care through alternative settings like schools and Head Start programs are increasing the number of patients seeking care. HB710 is an innovative and low-cost way to build up the Medicaid provider network by exposing students to Medicaid care and settings early in their career development.

It is also important to note what HB710 does **not** do. It does not alter or expand the scope of practice for dental students in any way. The Health Occupations Article §4-301(1)(b) already permits dental students to practice dentistry without a license, and this bill would not permit a student to provide any services they are not already permitted to provide under the dental practice act. This bill deals solely with Medicaid's reimbursement for those services. Second, HB710 does **not** increase the amount or cost of Medicaid services, but rather allows Medicaid-based practices to utilize student externs to assist with the services they are already providing. Third, HB710 does not **require** any dental school, dental practice or dental student to participate in an externship program. It simply opens the door for these parties to work to develop a program that encompasses Medicaid patients. Finally, HB710 does not dictate the terms or requirements for any future dental externship program in Maryland, but rather simply seeks to remove one particular barrier, and leave the development of these programs to the stakeholders that take part in them, including dental schools, dentists, students, state regulators, and any other appropriate participants.

Thank you to the Committee for its consideration and its longstanding work on dental access for all Marylanders, and Benevis urges the favorable consideration of House Bill 710.