

January 21, 2022

Sen. Delores Kelley, Chair
Sen. Brian Feldman, Vice Chair
Finance Committee, 3 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SB0150-Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults
Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Catherine Mello and I am writing in support of SB0150. For the last 37 years, BIAMD has been the only statewide non-profit organization dedicated solely to providing free information and resource assistance to the brain injury community. Through its Toll-Free Brain Injury Connection Center (1.800.221.6443), its website (www.biamd.org), and its social media presence, BIAMD has sought to educate, enlighten, and support the estimated 120,000 Maryland families currently living with the devastating effects of brain injury. Our organization also provides administrative case management for the individuals receiving service through the Brain Injury Waiver (BI Waiver), a Home and Community Based Medicaid Waiver that allows them the opportunity to receive their long-term care services in the community instead of an institution. They live and receive services in Prince George, Montgomery, Wicomico, Howard and Anne Arundel Counties. Many individuals in this program have significant dental issues as result of poor dental hygiene, medications and past substance use including smoking that is prevalent in his population. Seeking affordable, accessible services has been a source of frustration for both our provider staff and the program participants.

Affordable access to dental services has been a concern for both the individuals who receive BI Waiver services and the providers charged assisting them with accessing medical care consistent with the general population. Some individuals are eligible for Medicare and have accessed the Health Smiles Pilot for Adults with full Medicaid and Medicare benefits. The experience has been mixed depending on the county the individual resides in. The Prince George's County provider reports that dentist accepting this program were scheduling appointments at least 6 months out. The Anne Arundel County provider reports that they can get appoints in about a month. This program has increased access for some individuals who are eligible for this program, but it has not been consistent throughout the state. We hope that the General Assembly and Maryland Department of Health will use the experiences during this pilot project to address the gaps in provider participation and capacity to ensure that rates and requirements for participation with promote an adequate network to address the needs of these individuals.

For individuals who do not have access to the limited benefits through Healthy Smiles, primarily those who receive Supplemental Security Income and are only eligible or Medicaid access to dental service are often financially in accessible. Thirty-eight percent of BI Waiver Participants receive SSI and Medicaid only. After paying for their room and board, medications co pays, and other basic living expense there is

little left for other priorities. One provider paid for evaluations for the individuals they served. One individual to quoted at \$1500 for the extractions that he needed which amounts to almost double his monthly income. Many dentists require a large portion of the cost of care upfront before starting the work and the individuals in our program do not have the funds which means that if they are able to save the money needed for the down payment, it may take months. One individual worked with their representative payee to save money over the course of 8 months so that they could get the recommended extractions.

We also work with individuals who reported that they do not want to have a recommended extraction because they know they cannot afford dentures and do not want to be left without any teeth. Some individuals have told us that choose to use their limited funds for recreation expenses that they feel enhance their quality of life instead of saving every penny for dental care even if it means that they risk complications and risk to their health in the future because the costs see so daunting. These are just a few examples of the decision that the individuals we work with face when it comes to dental care.

Our organization supports this bill with cautions about implementation to ensure that the intent to expand access to services for adults and make access equitable across the state and consider quality of life and dignity for people living with disabilities. We do ask that the MGA and Maryland Department of Health consider dentures and partial dentures as part of the “comprehensive dental care” proposed in this bill. Having a “full smile” as one of our BI Waiver participants puts it, is a source of dignity.

As you will likely hear from other stakeholders, there are potential implications for grant funded dental programs in some jurisdictions and more concerns about provider capacity and we urge stakeholder engagement in both the legislative process and hopefully implementation of the expanded coverage.

Thank you for your time and consideration of experience and perspective. Please feel free to reach out with any questions you have about our testimony. We hope you will give SB0150 a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Catherine Rinehart Mello

Brain Injury Association of Maryland

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