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SB 306

Dental Hygienists – Consultation Requirements – Health Care Practitioners Hearing of the Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

February 1, 2022

1:00 PM

SUPPORT

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Health Rights Project supports policies and practices that promote the overall health of Marylanders struggling to make ends meet, with the explicit goal of promoting strategies that work to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes. PJC **strongly supports SB 306**, which would expand the types of health care practitioners with whom a dental hygienist must consult before providing treatment to a patient to include the patient's registered nurse practitioner, certified nurse midwife, or licensed certified midwife.

During pregnancy, changes in hormones and diet can make birthing parents more susceptible to dental conditions, like gingivitis, an early stage of periodontal disease. Between 60% and 75% of pregnant individuals suffer from gingivitis.¹ Left untreated, gingivitis can lead to bone loss, infected gums and the need for tooth extraction.² Though dental hygienists are already able to connect with patients through primary and prenatal care physicians, many birthing parents, especially those residing in rural communities and underserved areas, receive care from nurse practitioners and midwives. Under current law, these types of providers are excluded from being able to develop co-location agreements with dental hygienists. SB 306 supports Maryland's birthing parents by expanding co-location to include nurse practitioners, nurse midwives and certified midwives. This expansion would enable birthing parents without dental homes to establish a dental home during pregnancy or postpartum or reconnect with their dental care provider if they've fallen out of care.

Improving the oral health of Marylanders has been a priority for the state for many years and SB 306, if passed, would help further that goal. For these reasons, the Public Justice Center urges the committee to issue a

¹ Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Pregnancy & Oral Health, <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/publications/features/pregnancy-and-oral-health.html> (last visited on January 28, 2022).

² *Id.*

FAVORABLE report for **SB 306**. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Ashley Black at 410-625-9409 x 224 or blacka@publicjustice.org.