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To: Senate Finance Committee

Bill: Senate Bill 237 - Public Health - Dental Services - Access

Date: February 14, 2023

Position: Support with Amendments

The Maryland Dental Action Coalition supports *Senate Bill 237 – Public Health – Dental Services – Access* with amendments. The bill proposes to codify recommendations from the final report of The Oral Health Task Force.

MDAC thanks the Committee for its strong, continuous support of expanding access to dental services. Over the past five years, Maryland has made tremendous progress:

- 2018: *Senate Bill 284 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults* established a pilot program for dental coverage for dually-eligible adults.
- 2020: The Supplemental Budget provided funding for postpartum coverage in the Medicaid Program.
- 2022: *Senate Bill 150 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults* expanded dental coverage to include all adult Medicaid participants. As a result, about 800,000 more people have dental coverage as of January 1, 2023.
- 2022: The budget included \$19 million for a much-needed rate increase effective July 1, 2022.
- 2023: The budget includes another proposed \$20 million for dental rate increases.

MDAC supports Senate Bill 237 as it provides continued policy focus on improving the oral health of Marylanders. We recognize that the Department of Health may not be able to implement every provision in the bill, as the implementation of adult coverage has just begun and takes tremendous resources. Therefore, we ask that the Committee prioritize the following items:

- **Expansion of the Loan Assistance Repayment Program:** Maryland has 62 areas considered dental provider shortage areas, also known as health professional shortage areas.ⁱ We strongly support updated the amount that dentists receive under the Loan

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Repayment Program. We also support the addition of dental hygienists to the program.

- **Dental Assistants:** We request an amendment that would establish a stakeholder group to study and make recommendations regarding tuition assistance for dental assistants, as there is also a shortage of dental assistants.
- **Loan Programs for Private Practices:** The bill proposes a study group to examine low-interest loans or grants to support establishing private practices in underserved areas. We wanted to note that it may also be possible to build this initiative into the *Health Equity Resource Communities Program* under the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission.
- **Community Health Centers – Operating Grants:** We would ask for an amendment that provides funding for the Office of Oral Health to make operating grants to community health centers that have a high concentration of Medicaid patients. With the establishment of adult dental coverage, community health centers are important partners in building provider capacity.
- **Community Health Centers – Capital Grants:** In 2019, the Maryland General Assembly established the Community Dental Clinics Grant Program under House Bill 332. To date, the program has not been implemented because of a lack of funding. We ask for consideration of funding as part of the strategy to build provider capacity for the Medicaid Adult Coverage Program.

We ask for a favorable report. We would be pleased to support the Committee as it considers how to prioritize provisions of the bill. If we can provide any additional information, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.

¹ <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/dental-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>