



The Maryland State Dental Association supports SB 237 – Public Health – Dental Services – Access

A. Background:

In 2021 Maryland enacted HB 368 and SB 100 to study the barriers to access to dental services, and to make recommendations directed to improving access to dental care among underserved populations in the State. The Task Force held many meetings on a regular basis, received testimony from a variety of witnesses, made findings as to the barriers to Marylanders accessing dental care, and focused on what actions would be beneficial in improving the oral health of the residents of Maryland. The Final Report of the Task Force to Study Oral Health in Maryland was issued December 1, 2022.

B. SB 237 – Public Health – Dental Service – Access.

SB 237 was drafted by Staff to the Task Force as a first step in implementing the Task Force's recommendations.

1. Dental Screenings: It provides that the parent or guardian of a child shall have to provide evidence to the system or facility that the child has received a dental screening within six months of specified birthdays. In the public school system, a screening from a licensed dentist within 6 months before the child's sixth, ninth and twelfth birthdays. A child in a child care facility shall have provided by its parent or guardian evidence that he or she has received a dental screening within 6 months after the child's first birthday, and within six months before its third and sixth birthdays.

Among the positive results from these dental screening are: a) early detection of caries before more serious dental disease develops; b) provides the opportunity for dental education of the child and the parent/guardian on proper oral hygiene; and c) establishes a dental home for the child to receive regular dental exams, prophylaxis, and needed remedial services.

2. Expansion of the Maryland Dent-Care Program. The Task Force recommended expanding the Maryland Dent-Care Loan Assistance Repayment Program to include dental hygienists and to establish increase reimbursement rates for dentists, and to establish the reimbursement amounts for dental hygienists.

The purpose of this program is to increase access to oral health services for underserved

Maryland Medical Assistance recipients by increasing the number of dentists and dental hygienists who treat that population. The Office of Student Financial Assistance, with the assistance of the Maryland Department of Health, Office of Oral Health shall: a) recruit dentists and dental hygienists to participate in the program; b) determine if the applicant's practice setting is located near or is readily accessible to underserved Medicaid recipients; c) determine that the applicant qualifies for the program; d) determine if the applicant's practice setting(s) serves the required number of Medicaid recipients; and d) a Maryland licensed applicant demonstrates financial need, and agrees that at least 30% of the patients treated each year for a 3-year period will be Maryland Medicaid recipients. HB 290 provides that the amount of the loan grant be increased to at least \$50,000 per year for 3 years for a dentist; and be established at not more than \$10,000 per year for 2 years for a dental hygienist. This is a measure that will increase the number of dentists and dental hygienists who are accessible to the dental Medicaid population.

3. Changes to the Dental Medicaid Program. Among the issues affecting Medicaid recipients' access to dental care are: a) concerns about the legal ramifications of seeking public benefits and health care, including an impact on citizenship applications or legal residency status; and b) a lack of knowledge as to how to navigate the system.

a) SB 237 minimizes the fear of legal ramifications that inhibit this population from seeking dental treatment and services. It provides that the Secretary of Health may not condition or limit eligibility for dental services under the Program based on citizenship or immigration status.

b) This legislation also provides assistance to these recipients by providing that the Department shall provide reimbursement for services provided by a certified community health worker that assists a recipient to access dental service. A community health worker serves as a liaison between health and social services and the community to: a) facilitates access to services; b) improve the quality and cultural competence of the delivery of dental services; c) increase health knowledge and self-sufficiency; and d) other important services.

c) The bill will require the Department of Health in fiscal year 2024 to provide a 4% increase for dental services under the Program over the funding provided in the legislative appropriation for fiscal year 2023. The Department is also charged to annually evaluate reimbursement rates for dental services.

4. Plain Language Dental Information. SB 237 requires the Department of Health to create and distribute to dental practices plain language materials regarding: a) the importance of regular dental care for a person's overall health; and b) various dental procedures.

5. Mobile and Portable Dental Services. Under SB 237 the State Board of Dental Examiners shall require applicants for an initial license or a license renewal to report whether the applicant provides or intends to provide mobile or portable dental services. The Board is the required to publish on its website a searchable list of dentists and dental hygienists who provide these services in the State.

6. Required studies under the auspices of the Maryland Department of Health. SB 237 also sets up two studies: a) The first is to be conducted by a workgroup convened by the Department, to study the establishment of a grant or no-interest loan program for dental providers to open practices in underserved areas; and b) The Department is to conduct a study on dental provider participation in the Maryland Healthy Smiles Program. It shall include a review of administrative issues relating to enrollment of providers in the Program, and possible incentives that may be used to encourage participation in the Program.

The Maryland State Dental Association respectfully requests that SB 237 be given a favorable report.

Submitted by Daniel T. Doherty, Jr
On behalf of the Maryland State Dental Association
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