



Maryland
DENTAL HYGIENISTS'
ASSOCIATION

February 14, 2023

The Honorable Joseline Pena-Melnyk, Chair
House Health and Government Operations Committee
11 Bladen Street, Room 241
Annapolis, MD 21401

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT: HOUSE BILL 290 – PUBLIC HEALTH – DENTAL SERVICES
– ACCESS

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Dental Hygienists Association (MDHA) is an organization seeking to improve the public's total health by advancing the art and science of dental hygiene, including ensuring access to quality oral health care, increasing awareness of the cost-effective benefits of preventative dental services, promoting the highest standards of dental hygiene education, licensure, practice and research, and representing and promoting the interests of dental hygienists in Maryland. In keeping with that mission, MDHA takes this opportunity to voice its support for House Bill 290 – Public Health – Dental Services – Access, which would implement a variety of provisions relating to improving and increasing oral health by (1) prioritizing and monitoring oral health among Maryland's children, (2) increasing workforce development opportunities for dental hygienists providing services in Maryland, and (3) increasing investment in Maryland's Medicaid dental providers.

Oral health is an often overlooked and undervalued aspect of overall health, particularly among children and vulnerable populations. The Maryland General Assembly has done a great deal to increase focus on this important element of health and prioritize access and regular usage of quality dental services, and HB290 would add another important tool to those efforts. Currently, Maryland children and students seek and obtain regular medical care, often as a direct result of requirements for health screenings by physicians and other qualified healthcare practitioners that are relating to accessing fundamental public services like education. Establishing similar requirements for dental screenings helps create parity for how oral health is viewed by Maryland families and maximize its role as a key health priority. These screenings will also help Maryland better track how and if children have access to the services they need and, if not, create better opportunities for that access.

MDHA is always supportive of efforts to support individuals coming into the profession and we applaud Delegate Bagnall and this committee for looking to expand existing loan assistance programs beyond dentists and to be more inclusive of preventative care providers. Dental hygiene is an area that has been particularly hard hit by healthcare workforce shortages,

particularly for providers that serve significant Medicaid-eligible and other vulnerable patient populations. Anything the State can do to increase access to education, training and licensure for this profession is essential to addressing dental access needs across the State. MDHA stands ready to work with the sponsor and Committee to modify the Maryland Dent-Care Program to better address the needs of dental hygiene students.

Finally, MDHA adds its support to the widespread call for increased investment in Maryland dental care providers that service Medicaid populations. Unfortunately, prior to a limited increase appropriated in Fiscal Year 2023, Maryland had not seen a real increase in Medicaid dental rates for more than a decade, meaning the State's rates lag significantly behind other states, commercial dental insurance rates and Medicaid rates for medical services. Conversely, Maryland dental providers have seen the cost of providing services grow significantly due to inflation and supply chain impacts, increased cost associated with personal protection equipment, higher wage demands for essential services providers, and the implementation of expanded Medicaid coverage, including the newly established adult dental benefit. Stagnant reimbursement rates substantially limit the ability of Medicaid providers to absorb those rising costs, and regular and reasonable analysis of and increases to those rates is essential to Maryland maintaining a robust and effective dental health safety net.

Thank you for your consideration of the comprehensive legislation and we urge the Committee's favorable consideration of House Bill 290.