



HOUSE BILL 970

Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Hospitals – Dental Services

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE

HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

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For the Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO)

Position: Support – March 7, 2023

The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO), the professional association of the chief executives of the state's 24 local public health departments (LHDs), strongly supports HB 970. The bill would require the Maryland Department of Health to ensure that acute care hospitals participating in the Maryland Medical Assistance (MA) Program each develop a plan that demonstrates a commitment by the hospital to provide operating room time for certain dental services. This bill is in response to multiple Maryland hospitals unilaterally suspending all operating room access for pediatric dental services. While MACHO understands the economic realities of caring for low-income populations, it is critical that hospitals work to resolve issues and not leave high-risk patients, particularly children and disabled adults, without safe and proper access to care.

Across the state, hospital operating room time for all pediatric dental cases, and specifically for those enrolled in MA, was unexpectedly and dramatically reduced, or eliminated in the Fall of 2022, impacting 5,000 children currently on the waitlist for needed dental procedures to be performed under general anesthesia. The required annual plan will enable the Secretary of Health to monitor each hospital's commitment to assuring critical access to operating room time for all children and for adults with developmental disabilities, regardless of payor source.

The pandemic reduced preventive care seeking dramatically. But even prior to the pandemic, children and adults with developmental disabilities would present to dentists with such extensive disease that they could only be safely and appropriately treated under general anesthesia. While pediatric dentists reported a gradual reduction in the times for operating room cases over recent years, the dentists who performed a larger percent of the cases across the state were informed this fall that they would no longer have any operating room time available.

Recent concessions to make limited time available for emergency cases is not sufficient to meet the actual need. It also unnecessarily prolongs the duration children experience pain, increases the risk of infection, and increases the potential for triggering a whole-body inflammatory response leading to a decreased ability to eat a variety of healthy foods and attend to what should be the work of all children: play and taking full advantage of educational opportunities.

HB 970 gives the Secretary of Health an opportunity to monitor critical access and respond appropriately to make sure the children enrolled in Medicaid and adults with developmental disabilities are not relegated to substandard care due to the hospitals not allowing for sufficient, regular, and sustained operating room scheduling.

For these reasons MACHO strongly encourages support for this critical public health legislation. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, Executive Director, MACHO, at rmaioral@jhu.edu or 410-937-1433.