



Health and Government Operations
Committee
Subcommittees

Health Occupations and Long-Term Care

Public Health and
Minority Health Disparities

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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HB290 Public Health – Dental Services – Access

Madame Chair, Madame Vice Chair, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about House Bill 290.

Two years ago, I introduced a bill to establish a Task Force on Oral Health to study the accessibility of dental health services across the State, with a focus on preventative dental health accessibility for people across socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, age, and disability.¹ The Task Force published their results of that study on December 1st of last year, and found that while Maryland has a robust support system for those seeking dental health treatment, there still exist disparities in how people of different communities may access that treatment.² House Bill 290 addresses many avenues of improvement identified in the 2022 report.

First and foremost, House Bill 290 establishes a searchable resource for licensed dentists and dental hygienists across the State who provide mobile services, and creates a mechanism through the license and renewal process for providers to self-identify as providing mobile care. Mobile services allow providers to travel to locations more accessible to patients, allowing those who could not otherwise travel to dental services the ability to access care.

Second, this bill expands eligibility for the Maryland Dent-Care Program, a program for higher education loan assistance grants, to dental hygienists. Grants through the program are currently only available to dentists, and are intended to encourage a broader range of students to pursue dentistry across the State. Expanding this program to provide loan assistance for dental hygienists will increase the amount of hygienists providing care in Maryland, in turn increasing access to the first line of care in dental treatment.

Third, this bill requires the Department of Health to create and distribute plain-language materials to dental practices across the State explaining the details of dental procedures and the importance of care. Medical jargon and misunderstandings about treatment can cause individuals to avoid seeking dental care altogether. Putting that information in terms that the average person can more easily understand will increase willingness to seek treatment across the state.

Additionally, this bill establishes a framework for providing dental screening to students through the public school system, and prevents citizenship status from disqualifying a person from dental care through the Maryland Medical Assistance Program. These provisions ensure that Maryland's youngest and most vulnerable populations are able to receive proactive and complete care through our State's dental care systems.

At a time when dental services are becoming more and more comprehensive across the State, it is also important that we expand access to those necessary services. This bill takes strong strides to provide that accessibility to Marylanders who need it. I respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 290.

¹ <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/legislation/details/hb0368?ys=2021RS&search=True>

² https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/MDH/SB100Ch600HB368Ch599%282021%29_2022%28f%29.pdf