



HOUSE BILL 1146

***Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Adult and Pediatric Dental Services –
Review of Reimbursement Rates***

WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE

HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

***Barbara Brookmyer, MD, MPH, Health Officer, Frederick County Health Department
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 1146. HB 1146 would require the Maryland Department of Health to review by December 1, 2023 and every 3 years following, billed charges and reimbursement rates for adult and pediatric dental services, require the Department to use the data gathered to revise the rates for those services provided under the Maryland Medical Assistance (MA) program, ensure those rates are sufficient for access to care for Program recipients, and ensure that rates paid exceed a set percentage of commercial rates or charges, among other related responsibilities.

Across the state, hospital operating room time for all pediatric dental cases and specifically for children enrolled in MA, was unexpectedly and dramatically reduced, or eliminated this fall. As a result, an estimated 5,000 children with severe dental disease are currently on a waitlist for hospital-based care. These children are best served by having access to comprehensive dental procedures performed in a safe and humane manner under general anesthesia. Restoring consistent access to medically indicated dental care is a public health issue that deserves a timely solution. Notably, the MA reimbursement rates for anesthesia services were cited as the *primary driver* of hospital decisions to reduce or eliminate regularly scheduled operating room time for children and for adults with developmental disabilities.

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 last Fall they would no longer have any operating room time.

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 for infection, and increases the potential for triggering a whole-body inflammatory response, leading to a decreased ability to eat a variety of foods and attend to what should be the work of all children: play and taking full advantage of educational opportunities.

HB 1146 would ensure that reimbursement rates paid under MA program for adult and pediatric dental services are sufficient to ensure access to care for MA program recipients through a review process conducted at least every 3 years.

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.