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Committee: Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

Bill Number: Senate Bill 334 - Higher Education - Maryland Dent-Care Program - Eligibility

Hearing Date: February 14, 2024

Position: Support

The Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC) strongly supports Senate Bill 334 - *Higher Education - Maryland Dent-Care Program - Eligibility*. MDAC is. This bill expands the eligibility for the Maryland Dent-Care Program to include part-time dentists and dental hygienists who are practicing under a general or limited license; and authorizing the Office of Student Financial Assistance within the Maryland Higher Education Commission, in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health, to establish prorated loan repayment assistance for part-time dentists and dental hygienists.

MDAC's mission to develop and maintain a statewide partnership of individuals and organizations committed to improving the health of all Marylanders through increased oral health promotion, disease prevention, education, advocacy and access to oral health care. We are deeply appreciative of the partnership of the Maryland General Assembly in advancing oral health equity. In 2022, Maryland took a significant step forward when the Maryland General Assembly enacted House Bill 6/SB 150 (Delegates Cullison and McKay/Senators Augustine and Guzzone) to establish the Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage Program. As of January 2024, over 175,000 Marylanders have accessed dental services, some for the first time in years. This program will result in improvements in health outcomes for thousands of Marylanders.

Recognizing Part-Time Dentists and Dental Hygienists

MDAC has been collaborating with many partners in supporting the implementation of the Medicaid Adult Dental Program. Our community health center and local health department partners raised the issue of flexibility of the Maryland Dent-Care Program in our implementation work. The Program current requires participants to be full-time, which narrows the range of providers who can

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participate. MDAC supports updating the eligibility criteria to include dentists and dental hygienists who are part-time as:

- Other loan repayment programs for health professionals are open to part-time practitioners for: 1) registered nurses, advanced practice registered nurses, certified nursing assistants, and certified medical technicians; and 2) physicians and physician assistants;ⁱ
- The National Health Service Corp and at least fourteen other states provide for part-time eligibility for dental providers (AZ, CA, CO, DE, MA, MT, NH, ND, OH, OR, PA, VT, WA, and WV);ⁱⁱ
- Part-time eligibility is essential for including women in the Maryland Dent-Care Program. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 15% of women vs 3% of men work part-time in the age range of 35 to 44 years oldⁱⁱⁱ. Women are more likely to work part-time because of child care and family obligations. In dental hygiene schools, 95% of students are women; and in dental school, 56% of dental students are women; ^{iv,v} and

Supporting FQHCs and Local Health Departments in Retaining Limited License Dentists

When MDAC began researching this bill, we spoke with federally qualified health centers and local health departments. They flagged a need to support the recruitment and retention of limited license dentists, particularly in rural areas. Limited license dentists are internationally trained dentists. They work for two-years at an federally qualified health center or local health department as the last step in the process of obtaining a permanent, unrestricted license in Maryland. The first step of the process is taking the final two years of dental school in the U.S. or Canada. Our FQHC and local health department partner asked for help in retaining these dentists beyond their 2-year work requirement. If they were eligible for loan repayment on the U.S. portion of their education, it would be helpful. We believe this already allowed under Maryland law, but the bill would be helpful to clarify that point.

MDAC supports SB 334's provision related to limited license dentists to support our federally qualified health center and local health department colleagues. Maryland has 62 areas considered dental provider shortage areas, also known as health professional shortage areas. We need an estimated 348 more dentists to meet the oral health needs of Marylanders. In this time of severe health professional shortages, we should be looking for every opportunity to recruit and retain qualified practitioners.^{vi}

Conclusion

We ask for a favorable report on this bill. If we can provide any additional information, please contact Micheal Paddy at mpaddy@policypartners.net.

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ⁱ <https://health.maryland.gov/pophealth/Pages/State-Loan-Repayment-Program.aspx>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.adea.org/advocacy/state/loan-forgiveness-programs.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2018/article/who-chooses-part-time-work-and-why.htm>

^{iv} https://www.adea.org/GoDental/Future_Dental_Hygienists/Dental_hygiene_by_the_numbers.aspx

^v <https://adanews.ada.org/ada-news/2022/june/among-first-year-dental-students-women-see-highest-rate-of-enrollment/>

^{vi} <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/dental-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

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