



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle

February 12, 2024

Senate Bill 0799: Health Occupations – Limited License to Practice Dentistry – Services for Adults

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 0799: Health Occupations – Limited License to Practice Dentistry – Services for Adults

Dental Care in Maryland has become a challenge in recent years due to the limited numbers of available dentists. Rural areas specifically have proven to be further limited compared to metropolitan and urban areas. As of this year, there are 14 counties in Maryland that are in a county-wide shortage of dental providers, all of which are rural counties (Rural Health Information Hub, 2024). Residents of rural areas are struggling to find affordable and accessible dental care, causing seemingly small dental issues to develop into serious complications. The Mayo Clinic describes oral health as the “window to your overall health”, as one’s oral health can directly influence the health of the body as a whole (2021). To combat the dental provider shortage and bring quality dental services to Maryland’s residents of rural areas, we need to find innovative ways to recruit dentists to the area. There are several existing public health programs being implemented across the state, but supplying authorized providers can be difficult. Currently, there are education requirements that can at the very least delay providers from delivering care to the community. With the passing of SB0799, the process for dental providers being able to provide essential dental care to the community for our public health programs will become less cumbersome. In turn, providers may feel encouraged to care for our underserved communities. Improving dental care will ultimately aid in the restoration and preservation of health among Maryland residents.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
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Mayo Clinic. (2021). *Oral health: A window to your overall health.*
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/dental/art-20047475#:~:text=Although%20the%20connection%20is%20not,birth%20and%20low%20birth%20weight.>

Rural Health Information Hub. (2024). *Health professional shortage areas: Dental care, by county, 2024 – Maryland.* <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/charts/9?state=MD>