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Committee: Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee

Bill Number: Senate Bill 456 – Dental Services – Qualification for Maryland Dent-Care Program and Study on Use of Dental Online Credentialing

Hearing Date: February 12, 2025

Position: Support

The Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC) strongly supports *Senate Bill 456 – Dental Services – Qualification for Maryland Dent-Care Program and Study on Use of Dental Online Credentialing*. The bill will provide needed flexibility to the Dent Care Loan Repayment Program by adding eligibility for part-time dentists and dental hygienists. The bill also requires the Maryland Insurance Administration to conduct a study of the use of online credentialing platforms among dental carriers.

The Need for Loan Repayment Programs for Dental Providers

In 2022, the Maryland General Assembly enacted legislation to extend dental coverage to nearly 800,000 adults participated in Medicaid. This legislation recognized that oral health is a part of overall health. With the establishment of adult dental coverage, Maryland is improving health outcomes and lowering the cost of chronic diseases. The Maryland Department of Health reported that 181,216 people adults obtained dental services under Medicaid in 2024. This number demonstrates the success of the program in reaching Marylanders across our state.

MDAC has been partnering with the dental community, consumer advocates, and the Maryland Department of Health to expand the number of providers serving Medicaid participants. For our community health centers and private practices with high numbers of Medicaid participants, loan repayment is an important recruitment and retention tool, as they do not have the resources to compete on compensation alone.

Optimal Oral Health for All Marylanders

With Part-Time Eligibility, the Dent Care Program Would Reflect the Needs of the Workforce

Community health centers and private practices are particularly struggling to recruit and retain dental hygienists. According to the Health Policy Institute (American Dental Association) latest quarterly report, 92% of dental practices reporting that it had been extremely or very challenging when recruiting dental hygienists.ⁱ

This bill provides eligibility for part-time practitioners for loan repayment under Maryland's Dent Care Program. Loan repayment programs should reflect the needs of the workforce.

- **The number of dental hygienists working part-time is increasing. According to a survey, the number of dental hygienists working full-time dropped from 68.2% in March 2020 to 57.6% in August 2021, while the percentage of dental hygienists working part-time is increasing.**ⁱⁱ
- Women are more likely to work part-time because of child care, elder care, and other family obligations.ⁱⁱⁱ
 - 96% of dental hygienists are women^{iv};
 - 54.5% of dental graduates – are women who also are more likely to need to work part-time.^v

Other loan repayment programs for clinicians recognize the value in providing for part-time eligibility:

- In Maryland, other loan repayment programs for clinicians – physicians, physician assistants, and nurses – provide for part-time eligibility.
- 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).^{vi}

Conclusion

We ask for the Committee's support in updating the eligibility of the Dent Care Program. If enacted, the bill would support of community health centers and private dental practice in reaching a wider range of dental providers in their recruitment efforts. If we can provide any additional testimony, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.

ⁱ https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/sept2024_hpi_economic_outlook_dentistry_main.pdf?rev=a9c8497a7f7144d3837346cac311c488&hash=090A0346A769686474FD634B9355B5D9

ⁱⁱ <https://jdha.adha.org/content/96/1/27>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2021/>

^{iv} <https://www.rdhmag.com/career-profession/inspiration/article/14186906/browngirl-rdh-promoting-diversity-in-the-dental-hygiene-profession>

^v https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/dental_school_grads_gender_2023-24.pdf?rev=f60fe5b32e0848529a087cdcac9e42c2&hash=3A569643D4289D372ABF6E8DA79119FA

^{vi} <https://www.adea.org/advocacy/state/loan-forgiveness-programs.aspx>

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