

SB 456, In Support with MSDA Amendments

Written Testimony in Support with MSDA Amendments for SB 456 from
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Dear Members of the Maryland Senate Education, Energy, & Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide oral and written testimony in support with amendments to SB 456. I am a general dentist in a small group practice in Rockville that employes a team of 15 dental health providers and support staff. I am also the president elect of the Maryland State Dental Association (MSDA) as well as Deans Faculty member at our University of Maryland School of Dentistry. I am speaking to you today as an individual and Medicaid provider to you today.

The Maryland Dent-Care Tuition Repayment program is designed to help young dentist and dental hygienist to establish long term "roots" in communities that are Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA). According the American Student Dental Association (ASDA) the average student dental school debt was \$293,900 for 2022 dental degree graduates. This debt is much higher than any other professional school including law and medicine. Such debt greatly influences a young dentist's practice location choices and is a deterrent to being a dental Medicaid provider early on in their professional career. By contract, according to the American Dental Education Association, dental hygienists graduate in debt between \$20,000 to \$30,000. (Feb. 29,2024)

Again, this year, legislation has been introduced to fundamentally change the focus of the Maryland Dent-Care Loan Assistance Repayment Program. The bill would change and expand the eligibility of the program to include part-time and limited license practitioners.

This program is critical in encouraging people to practice in underserved areas of the state. However, the program has been historically underfunded, and especially in a budget year such as this, there simply is not funding to expand the program to part-time dentists. We also believe that part-time dentists are far less likely to stay in the HPSA after their three-year commitment due to insurmountable student debt, undermining the goal of the program to help dentists make an underserved area their long-term home, and continue to serve the Medicaid population. Dental hygienist graduate with less debt and would like the flexibility that part time work affords. Testimony by Registered Dental Hygienists on crossfiled bill HB 265 illustrated the need, particularly in Federally Qualified Health Care settings, for part time flexibility. It should be noted, no dentist testified in favor of part time work.

My oral testimony will focus on how import the need for fully licensed dental practioners are needed in HPSA areas to establish long term "roots." MSDA Foundation has placed a focus on attracting pre-dent student from HPSA to apply to dental school. Our Foundation has awarded scholarships to these well deserving undergrad students to sit for the Dental Admission Test (DAT) which is currently \$540. The goal is to assist these students' applications to dental school with the hope they will return to their hometown "roots". I grew up in Montgomery County, a product of the Montgomery County Public School System and spent my fist 2 years of undergraduate school at Montgomery College. I know how important it is to return home full time and give back to my community.

For the above reasons, I ask for a favorable report with MSDA amendments to SB 456.