

The Honorable Pamela Beidle, Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 3 West
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Senate Bill 0021- Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact

Chair Beidle and Members of the Committee,

How fitting is it that the hearing conducted today, and others with similar subject matter are taking place during National Children's Dental Month. Childhood caries (cavities) is the #1 most prevalent and **preventable** disease among children. According to a Children's Oral Health survey conducted by the Maryland Department of Health in 2023, 43% of children surveyed had experienced tooth decay. Based on population reports from our state in that same year, one can deduce that over 650,000 children in Maryland have experienced cavities.

Dental hygiene to its core is a profession based in prevention through action and education. We are the practitioners that focus on eliminating oral diseases that will, if untreated, affect the rest of the body. The bacteria in our mouths is not limited to our gums and teeth. It enters the bloodstream and affects the whole person and has been proven to lead to heart disease, lung disease, and even Alzheimers.

The registered dental hygienist is a role often overlooked in healthcare, yet generally has the most exposure to the population. You are encouraged to see a hygienist 2 times a year but see a primary care physician annually or as needed. We are in the perfect spot to intervene in early diagnosis of preventable diseases through screenings and referrals, but are underutilized and in short supply.

As some of you have heard last week, there is an almost emergent shortage of hygienists in our state. By providing dental hygienists and dentists with the opportunity to apply for licensure portability across state lines, it would allow for our state to supplement the workforce shortage and encourage compact providers to go where the mission is. There is a huge disparity in access to dental healthcare, and it is only going to get worse. It is frustrating being a provider that is unable to utilize our practitioner status to provide board-certified, state licensed services to a community that is desperately in need of it.

Please consider my testimony in support of the Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact. With 10 states having already entered the compact (our border state Virginia being one) and 15

more with legislation pending, this is Maryland's chance to be at the forefront of the compact. We should encourage and welcome providers to aid in treating Maryland's underserved communities, and help bridge the gap between prevention and diagnosis.

Thank you,
Kaitlyn Sams RDH