



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle

February 11, 2025

Senate Bill 492: Maryland Commission to Study the Dental Hygienist Shortage - Establishment

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, Senator McKay, and members of the Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 492: Maryland Commission to Study the Dental Hygienist Shortage – Establishment

Oral health is a critical component of overall well-being. Oral health is often a “warning sign” for serious diseases such as cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and osteoporosis (Altema-Johnson, p.5). Thus, access to quality and routine dental care is an important step in improving health for Marylanders. Dental hygienists make up an increasingly significant portion of the dental workforce with their employment expected to grow 9 percent by 2033 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Despite this growth, 74% of Maryland dental hygienists practice in only 8 counties, mostly urban (Altema-Johnson, p.19).

This bill will study the shortage of dental hygienists in Maryland and assess solutions regarding their recruitment, retention, and education. This is very important for rural communities as 67% of rural areas are designated as Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (Institute for Oral Health, 2024). Moreover, children living in Maryland stand to benefit substantially from the bill, especially children living in Maryland’s most rural regions. For example, the Office of Oral Health found the highest rates of dental decay and urgent dental care needed, 47% and 16% respectively, in Maryland’s western region (Children’s Oral Health Survey, 2022-2023).

The Maryland Rural Health Association believes in accessible and high-quality dental care. We believe that Senate Bill 429 is important to support the dental health and well-being of rural Marylanders. We urge the committee to support SB 492.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
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Institute for Oral Health (2024). New Report: Rural Populations Have Worse Oral Health Care Access, Utilization, and Outcomes Compared to Urban Areas”. <https://www.carequest.org/about/press-release/new-report-rural-populations-have-worse-oral-health-care-access-utilization-and>

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023). Occupational Outlook Handbook: Dental Hygienists. United States Department of Labor. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/dental-hygienists.htm>

Office of Oral Health (2023). 2022-2023 Children’s Oral Health Survey. Maryland Department of Health. <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/oralhealth/Documents/SchoolSurveySummary2023.pdf>

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