

Stella Hong

Committee: Finance

Committee Bill Number: SENATE BILL 492: Maryland Commission to Study the Dental Hygienist Shortage - Establishment

Date: February 11th, 2025

Position: Support

My name is Stella Hong, and I am a senior at Johns Hopkins University studying Biology. I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 492, which establishes a critical commission to address Maryland's dental hygienist shortage. As the bill states, its core purpose is "to support the State's efforts to improve the oral health of Marylanders by ensuring the stability and sustainability of the State's dental hygiene workforce."

I volunteer at the National Museum of Dentistry, where we frequently get tour groups of elementary, middle, and high school students. At our dental hygiene exhibit, we ask students if they know the names and purposes of the dental health professionals. While the students frequently tell me about dentists and dental assistants, it is often the case where they don't know what the role hygienists play in getting their teeth cleaned. The museum staff try to explain the history behind the rise of dental hygienists, as well as educate students on the importance of dental hygienists.

This legislation brings together key stakeholders from education, healthcare, and community organizations. The commission's diverse membership, including representatives from "rural community college[s] with a dental hygiene program" and "federally qualified health center[s]," ensures that all perspectives and challenges, including those of underserved communities, will be considered.

The bill's mandate to "assess the dental hygienist shortage in the State and the impact of the shortage on oral health in rural, suburban, and urban communities" is particularly important. By requiring "region-specific recruitment and retention strategies," the commission will address the unique challenges faced by different areas of Maryland.

According to the Maryland Public Health Dental Hygiene Act: An Impact Study, the recommendations made by public health facilities include "increased value placed on dental hygienists by dentists, administrators, and the general public," as well as increased sense of value felt by dental hygienists." SB0492 helps achieve both these goals.

The bill's requirement for both interim and final reports ensures accountability and timely action. With specific deadlines of "December 1, 2025" for the interim report and "December 1, 2026" for the final report, the commission will maintain focus on delivering actionable solutions.

I thank the committee for its leadership on this issue and urge you for a favorable report on SB0492.

Sincerely,  
Stella Hong

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