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Committee: Senate Finance

Bill Number: Senate Bill 492 – Maryland Commission to Study the Dental Hygienist Shortage

Hearing Date: February 11, 2025

Position: Support

The Maryland Dental Action Coalition strongly supports *Senate Bill 492 – Maryland Commission to Study the Dental Hygienist Shortage – Establishment*. The bill establishes a two-year commission to develop recommendations for Maryland to address the dental hygienist shortage.

The Need for A Systemic Solution to the Dental Hygienist Shortage

According to the Health Policy Institute (American Dental Association) latest quarterly report, 92% of dental practices nationwide reporting that it had been extremely or very challenging when recruiting dental hygienists.ⁱ As a result, dental providers have reduced capacity to see patients, leading to longer wait times for services.ⁱⁱ

Maryland is facing a similar challenge. With the COVID pandemic, there has been an exodus of dental hygienists from the field. There are simply not enough new graduates to fill vacancies, leaving our dental providers to struggle in recruiting dental hygienists.

In 2022, the Maryland General Assembly enacted landmark legislation to establish dental coverage for adults enrolled in Medicaid with HB 6/SB 150 (Delegates Cullison and McKay/Senators Augustine and Guzzone). Since the inception of the program, over 200,000 adults in Medicaid have been able to access dental services across Maryland. As more people seek dental services, we have seen the need for more dentists and dental hygienists. Nearly all of Maryland's jurisdictions have a dental professional shortage, according to the federal Health Services and Research Administration.ⁱⁱⁱ

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Roadmap to Addressing the Dental Hygienist Shortage

Maryland policy-makers need to know where to start in addressing the dental hygienist shortage. The roadmap can be developed by the Commission to Study the Dental Hygienist Shortage. The legislation will advance Maryland's efforts by:

- Establishing a two-year Commission with representatives from the public health, private practice, and education sectors across the State.
- Following a similar roadmap for studying solutions to the nursing shortage. Maryland launched a multi-faceted strategy to address the nursing shortage based on findings from the Maryland's Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis. The Commission was established through legislation in 2022 (SB 440/HB 625 – Senator Pam Beidle/Delegate Ariana Kelly).
- Studying key policy questions, including:
 - ✓ How can Maryland recruit and retain dental hygienists in different practice settings?
 - ✓ How can Maryland support our dental hygiene education programs in meeting the need for more dental hygienists?
 - ✓ How can Maryland support dental hygiene students successfully complete their programs? Maryland's Pathways to Nursing Program may offer a model.
 - ✓ Is there opportunity to increase the number of dental hygienists by supporting dental assistants and community health workers in seeking educational opportunities?

Commission Can Build upon Foundational Resources

The Commission will have foundational resources to help jump start its work, including:

- Virginia's Healthcare Workforce Data Center prepares annual survey reports on the dental hygienist shortage.^{iv} The assessment contains elements for Maryland to consider replicating;
- The Maryland Coalition for Allied Dental Education has been laying groundwork by surveying community health centers, dental providers and other stakeholders on factors impacting the dental hygienist shortage; and
- The American Dental Association/Health Policy Institute's comprehensive report on the dental hygienist shortage nationwide.^v

Conclusion

The Maryland Dental Action Coalition asks for a favorable report. This legislation offers a path forward in addressing the dental hygienist shortage and improving access to dental services in Maryland. If we can provide any further information, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.

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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://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=169&event_id=16330&meta_id=186515

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find>

^{iv} <https://www.dhp.virginia.gov/media/dhpweb/docs/hwdc/dentistry/0402DentalHygienists2023.pdf>

^v https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/dental_workforce_shortages_labor_market.pdf?rev=e6025d77df184e6c95dc7cefde4adee3&hash=225FCBBCCB67174AAFC760FE2287322D