

February 21, 2025

Submitted to: Maryland Senate Finance Committee

Subject: Support for SB0988

Chairperson Honorable Members of the Finance Committee,
My name is Saana Kataria and I am a dentist trained in India, currently pursuing a Master of Public Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. I also have hands-on experience working as a Dental Assistant and Treatment Coordinator in California, where I provided care for underserved, state-insured patients. As the President of the Johns Hopkins Oral Health Society, I lead a student organization dedicated to advancing oral health advocacy, education, and interdisciplinary collaboration to improve access to equitable dental care. Additionally, I serve on the board of a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in California, where I contribute to quality assurance and risk management efforts aimed at improving access to healthcare for underserved populations.

I strongly support SB0988, which expands school-based dental programs to improve access to preventive care for Maryland's children. Many children in Maryland lack access to basic preventive dental care, putting them at risk for serious health issues. According to the 2022–2023 Maryland Children's Oral Health Survey:

- 1 in 5 children have untreated dental decay
- Half of school-aged children need dental sealants (preventive measure that can reduce cavities)
- 30% of children need early follow-up or urgent dental care
- Western Maryland has the highest rates of untreated decay (27%) and urgent dental care needs (16%), indicating disparities in access to care.

In 2007, 12-year-old Deamonte Driver died from a preventable tooth infection after his family struggled to find a Medicaid-accepting dentist. His death led to expanded Medicaid dental coverage, but 21% of school-aged children still suffer from untreated decay, highlighting ongoing gaps in access to care.

This bill:

- Allows dental hygienists to provide care in schools under general supervision of a dentist, bringing preventive services directly to children who need them.
- Creates a statewide collaborative to assess and improve school-based dental programs, ensuring they effectively serve children across Maryland.

Expanding access to school-based dental care will help children avoid unnecessary pain, reduce school absences, and prevent costly emergency dental care. I urge the committee to pass SB0988 to expand school-based dental care and address the ongoing gaps in access to preventive services for Maryland's children.

Sincerely,

Saana Kataria

Master of Public Health (MPH) Student

*Co-VP of Intercampus Affairs, Student Assembly
President, Johns Hopkins Oral Health Society
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health*

*Co-Chair, Student Subcommittee, Diversity Leadership Council
Johns Hopkins University*

Email: skatari3@jh.edu, saanakataria@gmail.com

Contact: (530)921-2206