



Maryland Community Health System

Committee: Senate Finance Committee

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

Hearing Date: February 11, 2025

Position: Support

Maryland Community Health System (MCHS) strongly supports *Senate Bill 492 – Maryland Commission to Study the Dental Hygienist Shortage*. The bill establishes a two-year Commission to study and make recommendations to address Maryland’s dental hygienist shortage.

Urgent Need for More Dental Hygienists at FQHCs

Maryland Community Health System (MCHS) is a network of federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) that serve underserved communities in urban, suburban, and rural areas across Maryland. FQHC dental clinics are major components of the dental safety net system, providing essential oral healthcare services to underserved populations. Building and expanding dental clinics and retaining dental providers within existing FQHCs is an important strategy to bridge the gap between medical and dental services offered by FQHCs.

Maryland has long experienced a shortage of dentists and dental hygienists. Our health centers have particularly commented on the severity of the dental hygienist shortage. Some federally qualified health centers have dental hygienist vacancies that have been open for nearly a year.

The Maryland FQHC experience reflects national trends. According to the Health Policy Institute’s (American Dental Association) latest quarterly report, 92% of dental practices reporting that it had been extremely or very challenging when recruiting dental hygienists.ⁱ

Developing a Systemic Approach to Addressing the Dental Hygienist Shortage

Maryland has a successful track record of addressing health professional shortages through a collaborative, structured approach. Maryland has focused efforts on addressing shortages in nurses (SB 696 in 2022), primary care (SB 734 in 2022), and dentists (SB 100 in 2021).

By establishing the Commission to Study the Dental Hygienist Shortage, the legislation convenes an interdisciplinary group to make recommendation on how Maryland can support dental hygiene education programs at community college programs and the University of Maryland Baltimore, recruitment and retention efforts across different regions of Maryland, and dental assistants and community health workers interested in pursuing the dental hygienist educational pathway.

Conclusion

MCHS strongly supports this bill because Maryland needs a systemic approach to addressing the dental hygienist shortage. We ask for a favorable report. If we can provide further information, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.

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