

Stella Hong

Committee: Finance

Committee Bill Number: SENATE BILL 988: Dental Services – Dental Hygienists in Schools and School–Based Health Centers and the Maryland Collaborative to Improve Children’s Oral Health Through School–Based Programs

Date: February 21, 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 Senate Bill 988, which creates the Maryland Collaborative to Improve Children’s Oral Health Through School-Based Programs.

I volunteer weekly at Barclay Elementary school, a Title I school, in Baltimore City to teach 1st and 2nd grade students about healthy oral hygiene. Despite the oldest children being 8 years old, the children frequently tell me that they’ve never been to the dentist or tell me that their teeth feel sore from cavities. These experiences underscore the critical need for improved access to dental care within schools, particularly for children from underserved communities. I support this bill that helps expand the capacity of school–based health centers in providing dental services.

In many areas of Western Maryland, the Eastern Shore, and Baltimore, there are less than 20 dentists per 100,000 residents, which is much lower than the national average of 61 dentists per 100,000 residents. Senate Bill 988 will help increase access to dental care in rural or underserved areas.

Expanding the capacity of school-based health centers to provide dental services is a necessary step toward addressing health disparities. By allowing dental hygienists to operate under general supervision in schools and creating a collaborative effort to enhance oral health programs, SB 988 will directly improve the well-being of countless children across Maryland. Early preventive care is essential to reducing long-term oral health issues, and this bill provides a sustainable, proactive approach to ensuring children receive the care they need.

I thank the committee for its leadership on this important issue and strongly urge you to advance SB 988.

Sincerely,

Stella Hong

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