

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair
Health and Government Operations Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

House Bill 0045- Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact

Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Committee,

Dental hygiene to its core is a profession based in prevention through action and education. We are the practitioners that focus on eliminating oral diseases that will, if untreated, affect the rest of the body. The bacteria in our mouths is not limited to our gums and teeth. It enters the bloodstream and affects the whole person, and has been proven to lead to heart disease, lung disease, and even Alzheimers.

The registered dental hygienist is a role often overlooked in healthcare, yet generally has the most exposure to the population. Patients are encouraged to see a hygienist twice a year, but will see a primary care physician annually or as needed. We are in the perfect spot to intervene in early diagnosis of preventable diseases through screenings and referrals, but are underutilized and in short supply. As trained clinicians, we are able to identify signs of melanoma, oral cancers, untreated sleep apnea, gastroesophageal reflux disorder, malnutrition, child abuse, and even uncontrolled diabetes.

As Maryland borders four states and Washington DC, and is home to many military families, the privilege of licensure portability that the Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact offers will streamline the application process and allow for hygienists to easily transfer their services where it is needed. The Interstate Dentist and Dental Hygienist Licensure Compact continues to require the lengthy application process and fees associated with state-by-state licensure, which hinders our ability to practice and creates barriers to care by forcing providers to acquire multiple licenses.

As some of you have heard last week, there is an emergent shortage of hygienists in our state. By providing dental hygienists and dentists with the opportunity to apply for licensure reciprocity, it will allow for Maryland to supplement the workforce shortage and encourage compact providers to go where the mission is, thereby expanding access to preventive healthcare to those desperately in need.

Please consider my testimony in support of the Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact. With 10 states having already entered the compact and 15 more with legislation pending, this is

Maryland's chance to be at the forefront of the compact. We should encourage and welcome providers to aid in treating Maryland's underserved communities, and help decrease the gap between prevention and diagnosis.

Thank you,
Kaitlyn Sams RDH