



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the House Health and Government Operations Committee

Chair: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk

January 28, 2025

House Bill 265 Dental Services – Qualification for Maryland Dent-Care Program and Study on Use of Dental Online Credentialing

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, Delegate Bagnall, and members of the Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 265: Dental Services – Qualification for Maryland Dent-Care Program and Study on Use of Dental Online Credentialing.

Poor oral health not only contributes to pain, malnutrition, sleep deprivation, and decreased productivity, it also elevates the risk of serious conditions like diabetes, heart and lung disease, and osteoporosis (McDonough, 2016). Dental care staffing shortages are particularly pronounced in rural communities, with 67% of rural areas designated as Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (CareQuest, 2024). Moreover, the poverty rate for rural areas is 12.1%, higher than the state-wide poverty rate of 9.3% (Economic Research Service, 2024).

This bill will encourage the education and recruitment of dentists and dental hygienist in practices in which 30% of their patients must be enrolled in the Maryland Medical Assistance Program. As rural areas have a higher poverty rate, this bill is likely to have a significant impact for Marylanders in those communities and Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas. This impact is especially important for children in rural communities as cavities and dental decay are leading chronic illnesses between the ages of 1 and 7 (Adjaye-Gbewonyo, 2021).

MRHA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we urge the Committee to support HB 265.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
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McDonough, J. E. (2016). Might Oral Health Be the Next Big Thing? *The Milbank Quarterly*, 94(4), 720-723. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24869203>

Adjaye-Gbewonyo, D., & Black, L. I. (2021). Dental care utilization among children aged 1–17 years: United States, 2019 and 2020. *National Center for Health Statistics*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:111175>

Economic Research Service. (2025). *State Facts Sheet – Maryland*, <https://data.ers.usda.gov/reports.aspx?ID=4035&StateFIPS=24&StateName=Maryland>.

