



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 4, 2025

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 849: Maryland Commission to Study the Dental Hygienist Shortage – Establishment

Summary: HB 849 creates a commission to study the dental hygienist shortage across Maryland. This commission will consist of representatives from the public health sector, workforce and education specialists, as well practitioners and professional associations to review the issues of recruitment and retention of dental hygienists, the needs of dental hygienist education programs, and the support needs of dental assistants and community health workers to enter dental hygienist training programs, as well as targeted regional support for all of these topics

Overview: HB 849 builds on the work of 2022's [HB6/SB 150](#) sponsored by Delegate Bonnie Cullison, then Delegate McKay, Senator Augustine and Senator Guzzone. That groundbreaking bill provided for dental coverage for almost 800,000 adults enrolled in Medicaid. This was one of our most meaningful healthcare bills in the last decade. With adult dental coverage, we restored both the dignity and oral health of thousands of Marylanders. After decades of advocacy, we eliminated the artificial distinction between somatic health and oral health.

Since the bill was implemented in 2023, about 200,000 adults have obtained dental services using their Medicaid coverage. Some people had not seen a dentist for decades because of their lack of coverage. Now they have access to preventative services, such as cleanings, and restorative services, such as fillings. These services will keep them [healthier overall](#) and out of our emergency rooms. And just as important, we have restored the dignity of these Marylanders, many of whom were too afraid to smile or talk in public because of the state of their dental health.

Now, we need to turn our attention to ensuring we have enough dental providers to serve our communities. Dental hygienists are a critical part of our dental workforce, yet I have heard reports of the extreme difficulty in filling dental hygienist positions in my district, and I expect that you have heard these same reports in your district as well.



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Our Maryland experience with the dental hygienists reflects the national trend. According to the Health Policy Institute, [92% of dental practices have reported](#) that it had been extremely or very challenging when recruiting dental hygienists.

HB 849 establishes the Commission to Study the Dental Hygienist Shortage. This bill mirrors the undertaken by then Delegate Ariana Kelly and Chair Pam Beidle with [SB 440](#) in 2022, which established the Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis in Maryland. As a result of the Commission's work, Maryland has made progress, particularly in nursing, with innovative programs. For example, a Commission recommendation led to Delegate Cullison's [HB 354](#) from last session to create a wrap-around services for nursing students in community colleges under the Pathways to Nursing Program.

Under HB 849, the Commission includes educators, community colleges, the University of Maryland Baltimore, dental hygienists, dentists, and public health policy-makers. The Commission is charged with developing recommendations in several key areas:

- The recruitment and retention of dental hygienists across different regions of Maryland;
- How we can support our dental hygiene education programs to meet the growing need for dental hygienists;
- How we can support dental assistants and community health workers to enter dental hygienist programs and be successful. Just last week with Delegate Bagnall's bill, we heard about the importance of community health workers in the oral health field.

This bill also supports one of the Committee's consistent goals: ensuring that we have a diverse workforce that reflects their communities. We cannot solve the dental hygienist shortage without ensuring we are building the dental hygienist pipeline from diverse communities across the state of Maryland.

Conclusion: HB 849 addresses a major specific workforce shortage that we have across our state. As dental hygienists are at the front lines of oral health for both adults and children, it is vital to understand the recruitment, training, and retention issues that we face. Thank you for this Committee's long history of supporting dental access in Maryland.

I ask for a favorable vote on HB 849 and look forward to working with the Committee.