



Connecticut State Dental Association

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Legislative Testimony
HB 7069 An Act Concerning Access to Oral Health Care,
Public Health Committee, Monday, March 5, 2007
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Good afternoon. My name is Brian Duchan, and I have been practicing general dentistry in Westport for almost 30 years. I am also President-Elect of the Connecticut State Dental Association. I appreciate your allowing me to talk to you today in favor of HB 7069, An Act Concerning Access to Oral Health Care.

Over the years dentists have often been portrayed here at the Capitol as uncaring. I assure you that nothing could be further from the truth. Countless dentists on a day-to-day basis treat underserved patients pro-bono, without ever making a big deal about it. Charity, however, should never be misinterpreted as a health care system.

Like many of my colleagues, I discontinued my participation in the Title XIX program, now known as HUSKY, years ago after intolerable frustration and personal expense. My office still continues to turn away HUSKY patients. In easy to understand terms, the program has not been properly funded, and as you are aware, there has been no significant increase in provider fees in well over 13 years. But now we are at a point where we can fix it and prevent the reoccurrence of provider defections that have contributed to its demise.

Numerous states have proven that if the reimbursement rates are raised to the 70th percentile or above, there will be a large influx of new providers into the system. This level will not make dentists rich, but perhaps it will minimize our losses. If we continue to pay our hygienists, assistants and other staff more per hour than we are reimbursed, the system is destined to fail again.

In January, the Connecticut State Dental Association surveyed its members. Close to 400 dentists said they would either treat Medicaid patients for the first time, or, take additional patients when the reimbursement is raised to the 70th percentile as established by the National Dental Advisory Service Comprehensive Fee Report. Once the rate is raised, I fully expect even more will agree to do so as well.

Aside from raising the reimbursement level to the 70th percentile, I do have a few other suggestions that I feel would help to ensure long-term success. The hope is that we will not have to all be here doing this again in a number of years. The reimbursement rate should be indexed yearly to account for annual inflation. When the rates were raised 13 years ago this was not done, and thus, here we all are. Without keeping up with cost of living increases for payroll, supplies, etc., dentists will again be forced to withdraw from the system.

The credentialing process should involve far less paperwork, be universally accepted by all state approved administrators, and take a reasonable amount of time to process. I know of dentists who have wanted to treat Medicaid patients, but were dissuaded by an administrative process that took years in some cases, and which required a number of references, before they were allowed to participate. Ideally, the only credentialing process would be your license to practice dentistry in the state of CT, issued by the CT Department of Public Health.

Finally, a system should be in place that would properly direct patients to participating providers and hold those patients accountable in some way for continued failure to show for their appointments. Not showing up for one's appointment is frustrating and creates an unnecessary financial hardship for the dentist which, if allowed to continued, will push the dentist towards abandoning the program.

As President of the Connecticut State Dental Association beginning in May, I stand before you today to assure you that I will do everything I can to actively recruit additional providers once the reimbursement rates are raised to the 70th percentile. I understand that the stakes are high, and that failure is not an option.

I very much appreciate your taking the time to listen to me today, and would be happy to address any questions that the Committee may have.