

Testimony Submitted to the Public Health Committee by Jesse White-Fresé

Good Morning Representative Sayers, Senator Handley, and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Jesse White-Fresé, and I am the Director of the New Britain Oral Health Collaborative. On behalf of the members of the Oral Health Collaborative, we ask that you support and approve funding for HB 7069, *An Act Concerning Access to Oral Health Care*. I believe that you do understand how difficult it is for families with HUSKY insurance to find a dentist that accepts their insurance. A mere 4% of the state's private dental providers participate in the HUSKY program, and so much of the care falls to the safety net facilities that are overwhelmed with a demand that is almost impossible to meet. Consequently, waiting lists are long and many families cannot receive care when they need it. Any dentist that treats HUSKY patients can tell you the consequences of delaying care or not receiving it at all. In some cases we know that delayed care can be deadly.

In early February on Give Kids a Smile Day, New Britain area dentists generously donated 189 appointment slots to treat uninsured and HUSKY-insured children. The New Britain Oral Health Collaborative has cultivated collaborative relationships with 12 private dentists for the last several years for this annual event. Some of the dentists had previously been Medicaid providers that dropped out of the system due to low reimbursement rates and a complicated administrative process. One New Britain dentist told me, "I would love to participate in the HUSKY program but you cannot expect me to provide a cleaning for less than \$20.00. I just cannot afford to pay my staff and my overhead for such a low fee". I have heard this same earnest conversation many times before when dentists discuss the HUSKY program. I doubt that we would ask any other business person to offer a service that we know would lose them money.

A recent survey conducted by the CT State Dental Association among their membership indicated that 350 dentists would participate in the HUSKY program if the reimbursement rates were increased to the 70th percentile, and this year's response to Give Kids a Smile Day statewide indicates that this is the case. 350 more dentists in the HUSKY program would triple the numbers that currently participate. *We desperately need to reduce the all too common stories of children with rotted, broken, and abscessed teeth that need root canals at an early age and suffer from the perils of untreated tooth decay. We simply need more private dental providers to be adequately reimbursed as an incentive to participate in the HUSKY program.*

The members of the New Britain Oral Health Collaborative are ready to work with you to ensure HB 7069 is approved and funding is allocated to increase the HUSKY dental provider network in the state of Connecticut.

Thank you.

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