

Testimony to Public Health Committee -SB 1  
Submitted by Jody Bishop-Pullan, RDH

My name is Jody Bishop-Pullan. I am a Registered Dental Hygienist and Dental Case Manager for the City of Stamford Department of Health and Social Services, and project coordinator for the Stamford Oral Health Collaborative. I am here to support SB 1, An Act Increasing Access to Affordable, Quality Health Care and to thank and applaud Senator Williams for his Health First Initiative.

My job is to ensure that children who are identified with dental treatment needs are cared for. This is a great challenge as there are too few providers of restorative care for the number of children who need it and even fewer for children who have complex treatment needs such as oral surgery or root canals. As a result many children suffer from dental pain, which impacts health and nutrition and ability to learn. Imagine a child sitting in a classroom trying to concentrate on a lesson or take a CMT test while in pain from a dental abscess. That is not an unusual circumstance in the schools in which I work. Talk about leaving children behind.

SB 1 proposes that oral health be included in any discussion of a universal health care initiative and I agree. There is substantial research that dental disease is linked to many other health problems including low birth weight babies, heart disease and diabetes. Dental disease is preventable and restorable if you are one of the lucky ones to have access to quality care. The cost effective benefits of prevention of dental disease is proven, yet many of our citizens go without this benefit. Expensive emergency room treatment should be a last resort, not the primary means of care.

Another critical issue that SB 1 addresses is the need to increase the Medicaid reimbursement rates to dental providers. Because of the low rate, there are relatively few dentists who provide services under the current Medicaid plan, resulting in long wait times for appointments at safety net clinics. Expanding the number of people eligible for state insurance will not equal access to care for those people if there are not enough providers willing to treat them. There is only so much time in the day for providers to provide quality care to patients. What can I tell a parent whose child has been up all night with a toothache when emergency time is at a premium? We need more provider time. Unfortunately the current Medicaid reimbursement fees do not adequately cover the overhead costs associated with providing quality dental services. . The only way to solve this dilemma is to raise the HUSKY dental rates to at least the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile of dentist's fees. Doing so would go along way toward sustaining dental services in all settings.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important health issue for the citizens of Connecticut.