

TESTIMONY REGARDING
H.B. 7069, *An Act Concerning Access to Oral Health Care*

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Good morning. My name is Dr. Andrea Beltzner, and I am a second year pediatric dental resident at the University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine. I am here in support of House Bill 7069, *An Act Concerning Access to Oral Health Care*.

Recently, I evaluated a 3-year-old boy with a severe facial swelling in the emergency room at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center, also known as CCMC. I encountered a scared young boy with a face so swollen he could not open his left eye. The cause of the severe swelling -- a badly decayed baby tooth. When I looked at the rest of his mouth I found three more huge cavities. My heart sank. I knew that he would return to the ER at least three more times because he doesn't have regular access to a dentist.

This boy's parents knew he had cavities. They had tried repeatedly to find a dentist who would take their HUSKY insurance without success. Unfortunately, CCMC's dental clinic is not accepting any new HUSKY patients because we are operating at full capacity. We only can treat children who suffer from severe oral health pain or swelling. I am sure other safety net dental clinics also are operating at capacity.

Numerous times in my residency, I have treated young children just like this one with facial swellings, large cavities, tooth pain and abscesses. I know I have done my best to take care of these kids, but I've had days where I leave work almost in tears because my entire day was spent holding down scared children to take out badly decayed teeth. As I do this I can see that they have even more teeth that will become painful or infected if they are not treated, and then they will be back for emergency treatment again and again.

I selected this profession because I love children and want to help them be happy and healthy, but I often end up feeling overwhelmed and wishing that the system would change. It is clear that something needs to change as soon as possible. All children -- rich, poor, with private insurance or state insurance -- deserve to have access to health care that will address current emergencies as well as prevent future problems. There is no question that oral health is part of a person's overall health and without proper access to dental providers, the general health and well-being of children can be harmed unnecessarily.

If you were told that your child would only receive medical treatment in case of an emergency such as severe pain, infection or trauma, you would be horrified. Well, we should be horrified, because that is exactly what we are telling parents with children

insured under HUSKY because access to dental care is so limited. Please consider the type of care you would want for your own children when deciding on whether or not to approve an increase in reimbursement rates for dental providers.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.