

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and member of the Public Health Committee. 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 writing to support HB 7069, An Act Concerning Access to Oral Health Care.

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.

HB 7069 would raise the reimbursement rate for children under the age of 19 to the 70th percentile. This is important because the current rate is so low that it does not adequately cover the overhead costs of providing quality dental care. There are few dentists who provide services under the current Medicaid plan. The results of a survey of dentists conducted in Stamford in 2002, indicated that the main reason they did not participate in the State's Medicaid plan was due to the low reimbursement rates. The Governor has supported increasing the number of children signed up for HUSKY, yet there are not enough providers willing to treat them. The safety net clinics already operate at capacity. There are long wait times at these clinics, as there is only so much time in the day to provide quality care to patients. I frequently scramble to find care for a child who has been up all night with a toothache. Recent new accounts remind us that someone can "die from a toothache." We need more provider time. Increasing the reimbursements rates would help sustain all prevention and treatment programs in all settings; clinics such as my programs as well as private practices.

I also support having regional oral health coordinators to help children in areas with poor access to care and establishing the State Office of Oral Public Health within the State Department of Public Health.

Thank you for attention to this important health issue for the residents of Connecticut and for allowing me to provide this communication.