

TESTIMONY
Public Health Committee
March 5, 2007

Raised H. B. No. 7069 AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO ORAL HEALTH CARE.

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers, members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Monty MacNeil, Dean of the School of Dental Medicine at the University of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of **Raised H. B. No. 7069 AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO ORAL HEALTH CARE.**

Connecticut's children who are insured by Medicaid – also known as HUSKY – cannot receive the dental care they need. Less than 18 percent of HUSKY children receive a treatment visit during a year, yet we know that more than 30 percent of these children have untreated tooth decay. We also know that most children who receive dental treatment find it difficult to gain access to oral health services in a timely fashion.

As many of you know, the University of Connecticut (UCONN) School of Dental Medicine is the State's major safety net for dental care for disadvantaged and special need citizens. We care for patients from every town and municipality in the state and we serve a large proportion of HUSKY children with both regular and specialty services. Our UCONN clinics provide treatment for 24 percent of all Husky children receiving treatment services and 55 percent of all emergency dental care provided to Medicaid-eligible children and adults in Connecticut, making us the single largest provider of dental treatment services in the state. In FY 2006, 61.2% of all of the SODM patient visits were for Medicaid recipients; this represents greater than 57,000 patient visits. We provide more than 63% of all the dental care delivered to individuals with mental retardation. In addition, over 16% of all care provided by our dental students and residents occur at 10 off-site community or hospital clinics across the state where almost all care (i.e. 98% of visits) is for Medicaid patients. Overall, 70% of all School of Dental Medicine student and resident clinical activity is related to care of Connecticut citizens on Medicaid. In FY 2006 we had 93,611 visits in our dental clinics.

Because the current Medicaid fee schedule is so low, our facility has become the major safety net for patients who cannot find dental providers in their communities. For example, we have a current waiting list of six months for children who require general anesthesia. And we are no longer taking new patients between the ages of 3 to 5 years because we cannot provide them with timely appointments although we know there are extensive treatment needs in this age group. The bottom line is that we and other safety net clinics cannot meet the demand on our own. We feel strongly that the increases in reimbursement rates proposed in H.B. No. 7069 must be supported in order to

engage more private practitioners in Connecticut in treatment of Medicaid children and we are confident that the dental provider pool will increase if the bill passes.

Support of H.B. No. 7069 is also needed to sustain safety net clinics such as ours. The current Medicaid reimbursement fee schedule is so low that it is jeopardizing the School's ability to continue to provide the dental services most desperately needed by the citizens of the State. As an educational institution committed to training the future dental workforce, our clinics utilize fee schedules aimed at covering our costs and are generally one-third to one-half less than the usual, customary, and reasonable fees in the greater Hartford area. However, Medicaid reimbursement is significantly lower than these already reduced fees, i.e. across all Medicaid activity, about 25- 32% of School clinic fees. These extremely low reimbursement rates are placing our clinic and others in very difficult financial situations.

We strongly support H.B. No. 7069 and believe that it will help sustain current safety net activities, widen the provider network and will result in more oral health care for more HUSKY children. And these children are the reason why we are all here today.

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