

Legislative Testimony
SB 1 AA Increasing Access to Affordable Quality Health Care
Public Health Committee, Wednesday, January 31
Dr. Jeanne Strathearn, DDS
295 Farmington Ave., Hartford, CT 06105

Good Afternoon Members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Jeanne Strathearn and I am a General Dentist down the street on Farmington Avenue. I am here today to testify in support of SB-1. In particular, I am speaking to the portion of the bill with which I am most familiar, increasing Medicaid Fees for Dentists. I have been in practice for over 20 years. I am also a member of the American Dental Association Board of Trustees in Chicago and very familiar with access to care issues around the country. I am currently serving on the Give Kids A Smile National Advisory Board.

In a typical dental office, overhead costs are 60-65 cents on the dollar. Connecticut Medicaid fees for children are about 35-40 cents on the dollar. Adult fees are much lower as they haven't been increased since 1987 – now about 10 cents on the dollar. That means the state reimbursement does not cover the costs to provide the service. Or for every Medicaid patient, a dentist loses 30 to 90 cents per dollar. By requesting an increase in the reimbursement rates, dentists are not trying to increase their bottom line, but they must cover their costs. Many of my patients come from distant parts of the state and are deeply grateful to have found someone who accepts their state insurance. No business can sell its product below cost for very long.

Current research shows that oral health is integral to overall health. We know of the oral-systemic connection. We know of the relationship between periodontal disease and cardiovascular disease, diabetes, pre-term low birth weight babies and now possibly cancers. We know that dental decay is 5-8 times more common than asthma. We know that 49% of children in Emergency Rooms are there for dental reasons – a very expensive way to deliver dental care. There are enough dentists in Connecticut, but the issue is reimbursement. Two states, Arkansas and Louisiana have recently increased their Medicaid reimbursement rates and many others are seeing that they need to do this to insure more dentists participate in the program. In other states that have recently increased their Dental Medicaid rates, the increase in dentist's participating in the program is dramatic.

As a practicing dentist, I believe, and the statistics show that dental care is an extremely important piece of health care, especially for this vulnerable population. I urge you to vote in support of this bill.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have.