

Testimony to the Public Health Committee

HB 5540 - an Act Concerning Charitable Dental Care
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by Marty Milkovic
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Good Afternoon Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Marty Milkovic and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, a statewide coalition of people and organizations interested in access to oral health care. Our mission is **Oral Health for All**.

First let me thank you all for your work to increase access to oral health care. In particular the leadership of Representative Sayers, Representative Nardello and Senator Handley in last sessions addition of \$20M for HUSKY dental reimbursement rates. Of course the wheels of bureaucracy work slowly, but hopefully we will soon see better oral health care for our HUSKY kids.

I am here to support HB 5540, which would allow out-of-state dentists to participate and provide charitable dental services as part of the Connecticut Mission of Mercy (CTMOM), an event that provides free dental care to uninsured and low-income individuals.

This is Connecticut's first Mission of Mercy, a great concept that has been successful in several other states. The Connecticut State Dental Association and everyone involved in the project should be commended for their commitment to the health of our residents.

The bill would allow out-of-state dentists participate in this year's effort. We support the bill and have these recommendations to improve it:

- **Don't restrict the legislation to only the 2008 Mission of Mercy.**

Planning for future CTMOM events has already started and the legislation should allow out-of-state dentists to participate in the future.

- **Expand the scope of the legislation to include other charitable dental events.**

There will be instances in the future where it will be in the public interest to allow out-of-state dentists to serve Connecticut residents. Natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina, and other charitable events should be included.

Finally, while CTMOM and other charitable events are wonderful opportunities, they do not mitigate the need for a comprehensive health care system that includes oral health. Nor are they substitutes for existing public oral health programs that serve at-risk populations. Dental care in Medicaid and SAGA needs to be accessible and comprehensive. Efforts focused on the uninsured like the Charter Oak Plan should include dental services.

Oral health is strongly linked to overall health. Maintaining good oral health is a cost-efficient and effective way to contribute to overall health. It is only four or five percent of national health care costs, yet it can pay dividends far beyond that. In fact several health insurance plans are including certain preventative oral health procedures in their basic coverage for just that reason.

This is so because poor oral health is linked to a number of other health problems including heart disease, low birth weight babies, diabetes and other conditions.

So again thank you for your commitment to oral health care access. I strongly encourage you to approve HB 5540 and to add the improvements that have been suggested.

Thank you.