

Date: March 4, 2009  
Submitted to: Public Health Committee  
Testimony to: Senator, Jonathan Harris; Representative, Betsey Ritter and the  
Public Health Committee Members  
In SUPPORT OF: Raised Bill 5630  
Submitted by: Dinah G. Auger, RDH, BS

Sen. Harris, Rep. Ritter and members of the Committee:

My name is Dinah G. Auger, a licensed/registered dental hygienist, living and working in Norwich, CT. I am employed as the lead dental hygienist at the Dental Clinic at United Community and Family Services, Inc, a private, non-profit agency and FQHC-look-a-like funded Health Center. We are the "only game in town" providing dental services to Medicaid and Managed Care children, adults, elderly and handicapped citizens in our area. The dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants are very proud of our work at the clinic and definitely see on a daily basis how the need for oral health services is increasing. Even though we provide preventive services in over 60 schools, Head Start programs and Early Childhood Centers using mobile dental equipment and services of dental hygienists, we still have the problem of meeting the need for treatment of decayed teeth.

The proposed bill supporting an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner would certainly help to increase access to treatment for these children. Since a dental hygienist is a licensed professional, the added level of education and training plus valuable experience would provide a new mid-level practitioner, similar to the APRN in nursing, that could increase DIRECT access at a LOWER COST. We would still need a dentist to refer complex cases to, but having an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner perform routine dental procedures would reduce the number of children needing more complex care such as root canal treatment because of having to wait for an appointment.

The dental community needs to seriously look at how we can improve or change the delivery of dental care. The number of dentists retiring is increasing, the number of graduates from dental school is decreasing but enrollment in dental hygiene programs is increasing. We need to look at this level of licensed, educated professional and move forward with expanding on programs already in existence instead of re-inventing the wheel. The bill also supports creating an Expanded Functions Dental Assistant which I also support. Under the supervision of a dentist, services provided could be more efficient and more cost effective. Programs in other states have shown this to be a very effective expansion of existing programs. Through education and certification, it also ensures protection for the patients. Traditional "On-the-job-training" is no longer feasible with OSHA and CDC standards of care and practice. Too much is at stake in the health arena to hire untrained people to work in public health settings.

I ask your support of this important Bill: It addresses INCREASE TO DIRECT ACCESS in a COST EFFECTIVE way. Thank you for your time to consider my testimony.