

Testimony submitted by: Celeste Maida Baranowski, RDH

Submitted to: Senator Jonathan Harris; Representative Betsy Ritter and the Public Health Committee Members.

In Support of: Raised Bill 5630

March 16, 2009

To the Honorable Public Health Members and Co-Chairs;

My name is Celeste Baranowski and I am a licensed Registered Dental Hygienist practicing in a public health setting in Stamford. I am past president of the Connecticut Dental Hygienist Association, and currently its Legislative Chair. I personally support, and CDHA (the state dental hygienists' association) fully endorses, the passage of Proposed Bill 5630 establishing the creation of an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner (ADHP).

It's important to note that there are no other states that currently have authorized this position, although several states have created similar roles. However, there was also no Registered Dental Hygienist position in the US before Connecticut wisely pioneered the field in 1913 to deliver preventive services in the schools. The focus then was public health and continues to be so today. The Registered Dental Hygienist designation now exists in every state in the Union and Connecticut's leadership has proven invaluable to the national effort to improve the oral health of the public.

The role of the advanced practitioner (ADHP) will be to build on the successes of the Dental Hygiene program in addressing the needs of those individuals who are currently underserved. It builds on the Dental Hygiene tradition of offering frontline prevention services, and allows this provider a more effective array of weaponry against threats to oral health.

As you have heard from my colleagues, we have spent several years developing an effective and comprehensive masters-level curriculum to prepare Registered Dental Hygienists for the more complex demands of the new advanced practitioner position. The program will be a rigorous academic regimen to enhance the experience gained working in clinical settings. This curriculum has garnered support from a wide range of dental health professionals, and of the American Dental Hygienists Association (ADHA).

As you know, there is some level of opposition to the ADHP portion of the bill. That opposition is something that we proponents have been trying to understand and address since 2004. We have done exhaustive studies of practice models around the country and around the globe, and taken input from professionals at all levels. We have communicated every detail of our findings; from the underlying needs we have confirmed, to the educational enhancement necessary to support the position, to the clearly defined expanded role that the ADHP will play in improving the health of the public in a cost-effective manner. Yet those opposed return with the same questions and each time we point out that the bill and our supporting documentation have long-since answered those old concerns. Now, with an economy adding unspeakable new burdens to those in our state who have the least, and with dental professionals squeezed harder than ever before by rising costs and falling reimbursements, it is critical that we find relief for all in a bill that will, at no cost to the State or to any practicing professional, allow our profession to make a large positive impact in combating dental disease and decline.

My colleagues and I stand ready, today and every day, to answer any and all questions you may have. We strongly believe that an objective review of this proposal will lead to the passage of this important legislation.