

Testimony to: Senator Jonathan Harris; Representative Betsy Ritter, and the Public Health Committee members

In Support of: Raised Bill 5630

Submitted by: Marcia H. Lorentzen, RDH, MSED

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Senator Harris, Representative Ritter, and members of the Committee:

My name is Marcia Lorentzen. I am a registered dental hygienist with more than thirty years of clinical dental hygiene experience, hold a Master's Degree in Education, and am in my third year of the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at the University of Bridgeport. With more than 13 years as a dental hygiene educator at the Fones School of Dental Hygiene, University of Bridgeport, I am presently the Director of Clinical Affairs at the Fones School of Dental Hygiene. I support Raised Bill 5630, An Act Concerning the Establishment of an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner (ADHP).

The ADHP is being proposed at the right time for our nation and Connecticut. Access to oral health care is in a state of crisis in the United States with a mal-distribution and shortage of dentists. I have witnessed dental neglect of Connecticut's children and adults, those with special needs and who have no insurance or limited finances to afford care in a variety of settings that I am in association with, screening for disease, providing education, and establishing preventive treatment.

It is reported that the number of dentists graduating nationwide is fewer than the number of dental hygiene graduates each year, and that this number is also fewer than the number of dentists retiring, further complicating access for most of the United States. To help alleviate the shortage of dentists and the complicating factor that dental hygienists in the majority of the states are required to practice with some level of supervision by a licensed dentist, there is heightened awareness of the need for a "mid-level practitioner."

In Connecticut, law allows dental hygienists with at least two years of experience to work without the supervision of dentist in public health settings providing dental hygiene services as listed in the state's dental hygiene practice act. The ADHP will expand access to care provided to Connecticut's citizens. The Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner will develop, implement, and monitor dental hygiene care programs for at risk population, treat populations with special needs, and address oral health as an integral part of general health. In many respects, the Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner is quite similar to the successful Advanced Practice Nurse (APN), providing more care to more people, and being an integral part of improving our nation's health care system.

Students at the Fones School of Dental Hygiene students provide clinical care for more than 6000 patients, many of whom who have no dental home. During their visits at Fones, and in off campus rotations, patients benefit from a thorough review of medical conditions and oral health assessments, education, and preventive treatment, but they have limited if any access for treatment of their dental disease. And in our economy, there will be more unmet care due to financial restraints all around. The ADHP has the potential to serve citizens with unmet needs and extend health care to populations with limited access.

This Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner is seen as a cost effective primary oral health care provider. Education of the advanced dental hygiene practitioner is proposed to be at the MS degree level, expanding on the extensive education already obtained by the bachelor level registered dental hygienist similar to the nurse practitioner (APN) that was built upon the knowledge and skills of the RN. The Registered Dental Hygienist will not be practicing dentistry; the Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner is a dental hygienist who has been educated through a rigorous curriculum that leads to Master's Degree and prepares this new practitioner to provide care where otherwise there would not be.

Please support Bill 5630, An Act Concerning the Establishment of an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner (ADHP) and allow dental hygienists who have the requisite academics to enter into training and education, and succeed in earning this advanced degree in order to reach communities in need.