



Area Health Education Centers

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March 6, 2009

To: Senator Jonathan Harris, Co-Chair  
Representative Betsy Ritter, Co-Chair  
Members of the Public Health Committee

From: Joan Lane, MPH,  
Director of Programs, Southwestern Area Health Education Center (AHEC)

In support of: Raised Bill 5630, An Act Concerning the Establishment of Licensure  
for an Advanced Practice Dental Hygiene Practitioner

Senator Harris, Representative Ritter, and Members of the Public Health Committee:

Though I have worked as a public health professional for many years, I have to acknowledge somewhat abashedly that it's only in recent years that I've become aware of and engaged in the importance of oral health as a critical part of the overall health of the individual and the community. Fortunately, I'm not alone – as I observe that many health care providers and advocates are increasingly focused on the importance of access to high quality, affordable dental as well as medical care.

Engaged as you all are in this issue, I don't need to cite in detail the barriers to care that result in poor oral health for many of our state's residents. Though we have no lack of practicing dentists, their distribution and their affordability present a challenge to many. Though we've made good strides in the past year by increasing the HUSKY dental reimbursement rates, those gains are now challenged by Governor Rell's proposed budget, with its elimination of all but emergency dental coverage for Medicaid-insured adults, and its pre-authorization requirement for all but emergency dental services. These measures threaten to compound an already-existing access issue faced by many families.

The Advanced Practice Dental Hygiene Practitioner could be a strong vehicle for addressing the dental care access problem. ADHPs would add to the number of available providers, would ideally locate in underserved areas, and would present a lower-cost care opportunity.

I strongly urge your support to this bill, which would enable this opportunity for increased access. As with mid-level practitioners on the medical side (nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurse midwives), the market will determine public receptivity to and growth of this new kind of provider – but only if its possibility is enabled by the Legislature.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

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