

**Legislative Testimony
Human Services Committee
HB 5258 AAC An Advanced Dental Hygiene Practice Pilot Program
Tuesday, March 2, 2010
Albert A. Natelli Jr., DDS**

Dear Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and members of the Human Services committee:

My name is Dr. Al Natelli and I have been practicing dentistry for fifteen years in the town of Southington, in this great state of ours, Connecticut. For the record let me say that I am also a part time volunteer instructor of dentistry at the University Of Connecticut School Of Dental Medicine and a Town Councilor in the Town of Southington, "The City of Progress". I thank you for the opportunity to present this written testimony to you regarding HB 5355; please permit me to note that my testimony here reflects my individual opinion and not the opinion or position of any entity.

As a Town Councilor, reading the bill, I found it interesting that this agenda is at the forefront again. For the past several legislative sessions similar proposals and or initiatives have been defeated in committee for a variety of reasons. I am very concerned about two things, the economics behind this bill and the scope of practice that it initiates.

As the State faces a nearly half a billion dollar short fall this year and nearly a billion dollar shortfall next year I find it hard to understand why in the world we are even discussing this. I think you all have better things to discuss then this right now. There are unfunded mandates that need to be looked at; programs that may need to be cut or eliminated to save money, educational cost sharing shortfalls, infrastructures' that need fixing, jobs to be created, unemployment funds running out and we want to discuss a pilot program like this that will need funding and may not create a single new job. In fact it may just shift wages or roles. Potentially expanding the role of the dental hygienists may cost the state and federal government more money as they may ask for a wage increases. Again I reiterate, we need to be looking at ways to save money, not spend it this year and next. So please tell me how will this be funded and what I shall tell my town as you fund this and we cut dollars for education or other programs because you continue to spend, at this time.

As a dentist, nowhere in the general statutes in section 379 as it relates to dentists or 379a as it relates to dental hygienists is there a discussion or mention of "outline of mutually agreed upon relationship(s) in which the advanced dental hygiene practitioner and the dentist agree to the parameters of practice provided by such advanced dental hygiene practitioner". Thus the statute would need amending or a new provision written to it, no? In addition, and I could be wrong, but I thought it was the Department of Public Health that guides or establishes the scope of practice and not the Department of Social services. Also there is an established process for dealing with scope of practice. The Program Review & Investigations Committee has proposed this session HB 5258 AA Implementing the Recommendations of the PRI Committee Concerning Scope of Practice Determinations For Health Care Professionals. After an exhaustive study, this bill makes numerous recommendations for improving this process. Because of this, HB 5355 (ADHP) is premature.

As to the removal of teeth as well as the other procedures described in the bill, where is the training to perform these procedures? I went to college for four years, dental school for four

years, and then a one year general practice residency to hone what I learned in dental school, and then a fellowship at a second hospital again to get more advanced training to be a better dentist to serve patients. As this bill is considered, as I said above where will the monies come for this training for the dental hygienist? Again now is not the time to implement a pilot program, now is the time to look to save money for the state, not spend it

Over the last eighteen months the number of dental providers in the Husky/Medicaid program increased from 150 providers to over 1,000, and you can include me as one of them. You the legislators asked dentists to step up and we did. Dentists enrolled in record numbers to serve this great state and its citizens. And, by the way, a recent PEW Foundation report gave out an "A" to CT (only six states received this top grade) for its delivery of oral health care.

This bill also calls for a review after the 12 months (lines 118 to 128) but does not state how the review will take place. What are the review parameters and measurements? How will the program be reviewed for its success or failure and how are the terms success or failure defined in the bill. Then who is paying for the review? Who is involved in the review? The bill then assumes that the program will be expanded automatically; recommendations for the expansion will take place and an associated time line implemented, then policies and procedure, and finally statewide implementation. These are big assumptions. Again, what will the associated costs be? Once more I ask, why are spending money here?

Lastly I would like to say that the legislators have reprimanded dentists and dentistry as protecting its turf and or territory; I know because one of my legislators told me this and said dentistry needs to come up with solutions to the access to care problem. Dentistry has answered this call. It has the Mission of Mercy for the last 2 years and the third mission is planned for Middletown later this month. Furthermore, dentists have responded by enrolling to serve Husky and Medicaid patients. And finally, the Connecticut State Dental Association and the American Dental Association are working collaboratively with leaders in dental education and the other organized bodies of the dental team to develop a way to provide a workforce so that more patients maybe see, i.e. increasing access to care.

In summary I wear several hats here, Town Councilor, dentist, and educator as well as a member of the Connecticut State Dental Association and the American Dental Association. Once again I would ask you not to spend money at this time when we are nearly \$500,000,000.00 in the red this year and nearly \$1,000,000,000.00 next year. I ask you to cut spending and let organized dentistry present its plan that includes all ideas and all the team members to provide more access to care. I would even suggest not voting this bill out of committee so your time could be spent on ideas to save the state money, not spending money.

In closing, I would like to again thank the Committee for allowing me to testify before you today and would be happy to make myself available anytime should you have questions.

Sincerely,

Albert A. Natelli Jr., DDS
145 Meriden Avenue
Southington, Ct. 06489
H: 860-621-7977
O: 860-628-038
e-mail: albert.natelli@sbcglobal.net