

March 11, 2010

Dear Committe Members,

My name is Angelina Santa Maria and I am the Practice Administrator for Oral Care Dental Group, a group dental practice in New London, Connecticut. I'm hear to speak out against the Governor's intention of cutting the Medicaid Dental Program.

Our office has been participating with Medicaid for over 13 years and we have treated many patients during this time who would not have been able to be taken care of without Medicaid.

Many of our patients have challenges that range from mental and physical disabilities to being poor-MANY of which are seniors and many of them live in nursing homes.

The services allowed under the Medicaid Program are basic and comprehensive. It allows for preventative and routine services, fillings, extractions and dentures.

We hear a lot about the 46 million Americans without health insurance, but rarely do we hear that more than twice that lack dental insurance.

The case for dental coverage is the same as for health care. People without health care coverage often get sick with illnesses that could be treated at far less cost if caught early. When it comes to dental care, kids with minor tooth problems may end up with dental disease for the rest of their lives. This can hurt their ability to stay in school or get a job.

Adults with missing teeth find it hard to get jobs as well.

But poor dental health can also kill you.

The *Washington Post* ran a story about Deamonte Driver, a 12-year old who died of complications stemming from a toothache that could have been cured by an \$80 tooth extraction.

Deamonte's family had lost their Medicaid coverage. Bacteria from the tooth spread to Demonte's brain, leading to hospitalization and two operations. The total cost of the hospital care was about \$250,000, and sadly, the hospital was still unable to keep him alive.

Facts:

- Dental conditions become more serious and are more costly to treat without intervention.
- Untreated dental disease can have fatal and costly consequences.
- Access to dental insurance is extremely difficult for the nation's poorest.
- Poor oral health can complicate diabetes and heart disease. The American Cancer Society recommends a yearly cancer related check up for all people 40 years of age or older. *Someone dies from oral cancer every hour in the U.S*
- 130 million Americans, including 16 million children and 80 percent of seniors, lack dental insurance. This is more than

twice the total number lacking basic health insurance.

Having dental coverage can be the difference between simple tooth decay and losing your teeth, or the difference between a toothache and a serious operation.

Dental care is preventive care; it saves our hospitals and taxpayers the high

cost of treating life-threatening complications and helps poor people get and keep jobs.

I ask not for myself, but for the less fortunate, the poor and the seniors-do not cut the Medicaid Dental Program.

