

**Legislative Testimony to the Human Services Committee
Regarding: RB 5355 AAC An Advanced Dental Hygiene Practice Pilot Program
Monday, March 1, 2010
Submitted by: Jody Bishop-Pullan, RDH, BS**

Dear Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and
Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Jody Bishop-Pullan. I am a Registered Dental Hygienist, employed by the City of Stamford Department of Health and Social Services as a dental case manager. I speak in favor of HB 5355 because it would expand access to oral health care for thousands of low-income families who seek healthcare from public health facilities. My position with the Health Department is to oversee the oral health program and to ensure children receive preventive and restorative care. Currently, I see too many patients for the number of providers. Wait times for appointments are long and children go without treatment for long periods of time. Last year, from our Stamford school program alone, we referred 1051 children who had dental decay. 47% of them received treatment by the end of the school year. In our clinic, we saw 150 of those children in the one day per week we are able to afford to provide treatment. Many children required multiple appointments to complete. So you see my frustration. How do we justify letting 53% of children in need, walk around with disease that impacts their ability to eat meals and learn in school.

Prevention and early intervention are key to decreasing the risk of infections and occurrence of more complex dental problems as well as decreasing the cost of oral health care. The ideal setting to provide services to low-income families is in schools where children are, neighborhood community clinics where families live or mobile clinics that travel to the clients. These sites reduce barriers to care such as transportation and time away from work and school. Yet we know our school based clinics and public health facilities operate on shoestring budgets and funding is scarce.

An Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner who delivers limited treatment services is a cost effective way to accomplish that. Dentists willing to work in Public Health are hard to find and expensive to hire. I see the ADHP as an affordable alternative for public health facilities to deliver care. They would be able to expand the number and type of services offered to more clients and do so with reasonable cost to the facility.

Some may offer what seem to be reasonable solutions to my problem-dentists volunteering in the schools. or opening offices for one day of free services each year. They do not understand the incredible need for children and their families to have the continuity of care from a provider they know and trust. These are band aid approaches that do not address the systemic change our healthcare system needs and our residents deserve. Even with the increase in the number of dentists taking the HUSKY insurance, the percentage of children receiving care was up only 3 percentage points from last year.

Health care reform is on the minds of the people our legislators and our President. It's time we stopped doing things the same way and expecting different results. It's time to offer solutions that will truly reform the delivery of oral healthcare in the way the use of APRN's known as nurse practitioners provide primary healthcare.

The language in the bill that addresses a pilot program, especially the timeframe, is a concern to me. While I normally support pilot programs, in this case, I am not sure it would be a viable solution. The timeframe for the proposed pilot program does not allow time to complete the educational program required to become an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner. The program takes at least 18 months to complete before being able to practice. Limiting the site of the pilot program to one part of the state, not only limits the number of potential candidates, but does not address the needs of public health programs and patients in other parts of the state. In addition, it seems to me that few if any dental hygienists would want to invest the time and money in an educational program without assurance that will have the legal opportunity to practice.