

Testimony from Deborah L. Arslan RDH, B.S.

**Testimony to the Connecticut General Assembly, Public Health Committee
In Support of
Proposed H.B. No. 5616
AN ACT CONCERNING LICENSURE OF ADVANCED DENTAL HYGIENE
PRACTITIONERS.**

February 28, 2011

Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak and members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Deborah L. Arslan. I am a licensed, registered dental hygienist practicing in Connecticut and Massachusetts. As a resident of Enfield, CT and an employee of Hartford Public Schools (HPS) Dental Program, I am representing the town I live in and the children I serve in Hartford. I support **Raised Bill 5616**, an act concerning the establishment of Licensure for an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioners.

As a practicing dental hygienist with over 30 years of experience in both private and public health, I am uniquely qualified to testify to the disparities in the access to care problem that exists in the underserved populations. In the early 1900's Hartford Public Schools was the first school district in the Nation to offer dental hygiene services. In the mid 1970's, services were expanded to include Comprehensive Restorative care.

Examples of the clear impact of school-based comprehensive dental services in HPS were demonstrated at the Betances Elementary School Dental Clinic, which saw the decay rate dropped by 21 percent in the clinic's first year of operation. In the first two years of operation, the Sanchez School Dental Clinic saw the number of children needing immediate, urgent dental care decreased by 67 percent. Despite these strides, the services rendered in the current program cannot meet the dental needs of the underserved population of Hartford.

In September 2010, the HPS Dental Program was unfortunate to loss one of the 3 full time Dentists employed by the Hartford School System to the private sector. This Dentist had been employed full time for Hartford Schools for over 12 years. The School System has advertised this opening multiple times, including a notice on the Connecticut Dental Association (CDA) website. There have been NO applications for this position. Further concern for the largest school-based dental program in the country is that one of the remaining 2 full time dentists with over 30 years employment in the HPS Dental Program will be retiring within the next few years. Given the fact that the current dentist position has not been filled, I fear the necessary comprehensive (restorative) services will be even more negatively impacted by this retirement.

In the Pew Report of September 2009, concerning Access to Dental Care in the United States, the HPS Dental Program was the program highlighted as a success in delivering

dental services in an urban setting. This will not remain if the program cannot deliver the restorative services that are needed because the school system is unable to hire a dentist. The demographic composition of Hartford school children places them at exceptionally high risk for dental decay. Having a mid-level provider similar to the Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) model will bridge the gap in providing the oral health care the Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner (ADHP) could perform in the expanded scope of practice. The answer to this problem would be an ADHP.

It is important to understand the link between oral health and overall health. It is well recognized that tooth decay and gum disease can result in severe pain, tooth loss, and costly replacement procedures. Effects of these diseases can reduce optimal physical health, reduces a child's readiness to learn, and contributes to absences from school as well as unnecessary emergency room visits. The U.S. Public Health Service has reported that more than half of U.S. children aged 5 to 17 years old have cavities and a fourth of these children--primarily low-income children from traditional underserved groups--incur 75 percent of these cavities. It is my personal opinion that the advanced dental hygiene Master's degree position will not detract from dentistry but would add a vital component in the resolution of the crisis in access to dental care.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance and cost effective way this position would help in addressing the access to care for the underserved in CT.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

I may be reached for further discussion at:

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