

Testimony to the Human Services Committee - HB 5616 – March 1, 2011
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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 5616 because it would expand 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 nearly 1000 children with dental decay. 48% 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 that we were able to afford to provide treatment. Many children require multiple appointments to complete. So you see my frustration. How do we justify letting 52% of children in need, have 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 the barriers to care such as transportation, cost and time away from work and school. Yet we know our school based clinics and public health facilities operation 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 for public health facilities 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 a 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 one day 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 increasing number of dentists taking the HUSKY insurance, the percentage of children referred from our program and receiving care was up only one percentage point from last year. I also want to stress my constant reference to the family in my testimony, as it is even harder for adults to obtain care. There is a link between dental disease and total health, and dental disease is infectious, therefore it important that both adults and children have access to oral health services that will keep the family as a whole, disease free.

Having served on a subcommittee of the Sustinet Plan, I know that our leaders are committed to reforming Connecticut's healthcare system while improving the health of our residents and the cost effectiveness of care. I offer the solution of an Advanced Dental Health Practitioner toward that goal. Thank you for your time. I hope you will support HB 5616.