



Community Health Center Association of Connecticut

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Testimony of

THE COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER ASSOCIATION OF CONNECTICUT (CHCACT)

Before

The Public Health Committee

Regarding House Bill 5243: An Act Concerning the Use of Mercury in Dentistry

Presented by

Deb Polun, Director of Government Affairs and Media Relations

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The Community Health Center Association of Connecticut (CHCACT) has the privilege of working with all Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) in Connecticut. FQHCs provide critical access and high quality primary care and preventive services to patients in underserved areas of our state, regardless of ability to pay. They are a large and absolutely critical component of Connecticut's health care delivery system. In 2011, 14 health centers in the state combined cared for over 328,000 unduplicated users and provided well over one and a half million visits. FQHCs also make an enormous contribution to oral health in our state: in 2010, ten FQHCs in our state served over 54,000 dental patients, for a total of almost 173,000 visits.

Respectfully, CHCACT opposes this legislation, which would effectively ban the use of mercury in fillings. CHCACT is concerned that this legislation would hamper the ability of FQHCs to serve dental patients. Without additional reimbursement to compensate for the cost of alternative fillings, FQHCs would be faced with higher costs of providing services which are already under-reimbursed. FQHCs would be forced to curtail dental services provided to low-income residents across the state and fewer patients would be served.

Amalgam fillings – which are comprised of a mixture of metals, including mercury – are safe, durable and cost-effective. Banning the use of mercury in dentistry will come with two costs: one, for the more expensive up-front cost of alternative fillings (generally, composite resins), and the second for the cost of replacing those alternative fillings over time, as they have been shown to need replacement more frequently.

Amalgam fillings repeatedly have been deemed safe for use in individuals over the age of six by the US Food and Drug Administration. Although those fillings do contain low levels of mercury, scientific studies have shown that even individuals with fifteen or more amalgam fillings have far below the lowest levels of mercury exposure associated with harm. The mercury in amalgam fillings poses no greater harm to individuals than the low levels of Bisphenol A (BPA) sometimes found in composite fillings.

As this Committee knows, ten years ago, the Connecticut General Assembly passed wide-ranging legislation (PA 02-90) to reduce the sale, distribution and use of mercury in our state. Because of that bill, Best Practices have been established and approved to prevent mercury from being improperly discharged into our waters and to ensure proper handling and disposing of mercury. *CHCACT* believes that legislation has been effective and is sufficient to address any concerns about mercury exposure.

On behalf of the patients and families currently served by FQHCs, we ask that the Committee not move forward with this legislation at this time. *CHCACT*'s member community health centers are appreciative of the Committee's past support and ongoing interest in preserving the statewide system of care that health centers offer Connecticut's neediest children and families.

Thank you.