

Legislative Testimony
HB 5541 An Act Concerning Services Provided by Dental Professionals and
Certification for Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioners

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Margaret Drozdowski Maule, DMD, MBA

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and Members of the Public Health Committee: I am Dr. Maggie Drozdowski Maule, a general dentist practicing in the state of Connecticut since my graduation from University of Connecticut in 1998 and currently the Chief Dental Officer of the Community Health Center, Inc. (CHC). Last year, CHC provided oral health care to 30,000 patients in our state. We also support the efforts of others to create access to dentistry, such as Give Kids a Smile Day and the Connecticut Mission of Mercy. The vast majority of our patients are uninsured, underinsured, or publicly insured. Many live with multiple chronic illnesses, and most have incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level.

I am here today on behalf of the Community Health Center, and to testify about the importance of making quality dental care accessible to all of the people of Connecticut, and to offer CHC's support for the innovations proposed under this Bill. I also applaud the General Assembly for the efforts made thus far towards removing the barriers to care for the underserved. The recent increase of Medicaid reimbursement fees has significantly increased the utilization of dental care by children enrolled in Medicaid. While there have been important improvements in dental care in Connecticut over the past decade, including the fee increase, there still remains much to be done.

Bill 5541 calls for multiple innovations that address the issues of access to oral health care. It establishes an expanded function dental assistant. It would allow registered dental hygienists the ability to diagnose and dental triage. Finally, it calls for the development of a significant education and practice infrastructure change through the creation of a new category of license, the advanced dental hygiene practitioner. The first two innovations could be accomplished fairly expeditiously, while the third would, of course, require significant development activity.

While the Pew Center on the States gave Connecticut an A for its efforts in strengthening children's dental health in 2011, one of the benchmarks Connecticut did not meet was in authorizing new primary care dental providers.ⁱ There are several different approaches to addressing this recommendation by the Pew Center on the States, the National Academy for State Health Policy, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.ⁱⁱ While there are always concerns raised that require discussion whenever a new category of healthcare professional is proposed, CHC is committed to working with other leaders in our state to advance innovations that achieve the triple aim of better access, better care, and reduced cost. Connecticut has an opportunity to lead in this initiative, and we look forward to working in collaboration with other partners on this initiative.

We applaud the direction of the General Assembly in ensuring continued progress towards access to dental services and improved outcomes of oral health for our residents.

Respectfully Submitted,

Margaret Drozdowski Maule, DMD, MBA
Chief Dental Officer
Community Health Center, Inc
85 Lafayette Street
New Britain, CT 06053
Maggie@chc1.com

ⁱ The State of Children's Dental Health: Making Coverage Matter -- Connecticut
http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewcenteronthestatesorg/Initiatives/Childrens_Dental_Health/048_11_DENT_50_State_Factsheets_Connecticut_052311_web.pdf

ⁱⁱ Help Wanted: A Policy Maker's Guide to New Dental Providers.
http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/Dental_Report_Help_Wanted.pdf