

Testimony to: Senator Terry Gerratana, Representative Betsy Ritter, and the Public Health Committee members

In Support of: Raised Bill 5541

Submitted by: Marcia H. Lorentzen, RDH, MEd, Ed.D.

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Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, and members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Marcia Lorentzen. I am a registered dental hygienist with more than thirty years of clinical dental hygiene experience, hold a Master's Degree in Education, and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Bridgeport. Presently I am Director of Clinical Affairs at the Fones School of Dental Hygiene and continue teaching clinically, in the traditional classroom, and online, to students in all three levels of the dental hygiene program – AS, BS, and MSDH - at University of Bridgeport. I support Raised Bill 5541, An Act Concerning Services Provided Dental Professionals and Certification for Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioners, and wish to share with you rationale for requesting your support of what has become a controversial issue.

The ADHP is being proposed at the right time for our nation and Connecticut. Access to oral health care is in a state of crisis in the United States with a mal-distribution and shortage of dentists. I have witnessed dental neglect of Connecticut's children and adults, those with special needs and who have no insurance or limited finances to afford care in a variety of settings that I am in association with, screening for disease, providing education, and establishing preventive treatment. The midlevel provider, a registered dental hygienist, educated at the Master degree level for advanced patient care, and in a collaborative agreement with a dentist, can help solve these issues. It is a logical extension of the concentrated dental hygiene curriculum.

In Connecticut, statutes allow dental hygienists with at least two years of experience to work without the supervision of dentist in public health settings providing dental hygiene services allowed through the dental hygiene practice act and as a primary care provider. The Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner will expand access to care through a collaborative arrangement with the practicing dentist, which is exactly what Minnesota has successfully created in establishing the Master of Science in Oral Health Care Practitioner. Minnesota has launched a new midlevel practitioner to treat patients/clients with primary and secondary preventive treatment, through a collaborative arrangement with a dentist. Although Minnesota calls the new midlevel provider an Advanced Dental Therapist, it is actually quite similar in curriculum and scope of practice to the proposed CT ADHP.

Presently at the University of Bridgeport there are more than 130 registered dental hygienists enrolled in the bachelor degree completion program and 70 in the Master Degree program, either in the Dental Public Health or Dental Hygiene Education tracks. The current program requires completion of 36 credits over a two year period, and

completion of a research based thesis. Five students have graduated with the MSDH since 2010. Two of my colleagues presenting testimony today are MSDH graduates of and on faculty at the University of Bridgeport. Given the opportunity to provide more oral care through the midlevel provider, these qualified individuals would be appropriate candidates to enter into the ADHP curriculum.

The proposed Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner elevates the strong medical and dental hygiene, evidenced-based foundation of the licensed associate degree dental hygienist and the advanced critical thinking, broad-based baccalaureate degree education. The proposed curriculum is tailored to position the midlevel provider in a collaborative position, to work with the dentist in extending care to patients who need it. The career ladder, as it is sometimes referenced, allows those dental hygienists who want it to move forward in their career. Entering into the MSDH curriculum as a baccalaureate degree educated, experienced, licensed dental hygienist is a logical progression for advanced dental hygiene practice, expanding the scope of practice commensurate with the proposed educational curriculum. Many current University of Bridgeport BSDH and MSDH students have shared with current course faculty their interest in becoming a midlevel practitioner. They have compassion for working within the dental health care system to offer more care to the people they see.

Associate degree students provide more than 500 hours of clinical care to patients who present with complex medical issues for which dental hygiene students must conduct an extensive medical history with the patient, often involving the need to consult a medical doctor. Patients benefit from a thorough review of medical conditions and oral health assessments, education, and preventive treatment, but they have limited if any access for treatment of their dental disease. Individuals come to Fones clinic to receive dental hygiene services at very low cost; patients are specifically referred to the clinic from local dental offices and community health centers to receive more extensive periodontal cleanings and x-rays due to the exemplary care we deliver at low cost. And in our economy, there will be more unmet care due to financial restraints. The ADHP has the potential to serve citizens with unmet needs and extend health care to populations with limited access.

Please support Bill 5541, An Act Concerning Services Provided Dental Professionals and Certification for Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioners and allow dental hygienists who have the requisite academics to enter into training and education, and succeed in earning this advanced degree in order to reach communities in need.

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