

Legislative Testimony
HB 5243 An Act Concerning The Use Of Mercury In Dentistry
March 7, 2012
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Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and Members of the Public Health Committee, I am a dentist who has practiced general dentistry in New Britain and Farmington for 23 years. I have also worked at the Community Dental Center at St. Francis Hospital, have served as nursing home dental consultant, chaired the Hartford Dental Society's SmileMobile program, participated in CT-Mission of Mercy, Give Kids A Smile, and on occasion provide pro bono dental care to patients in my office. I am also a participating provider in the Medicaid (Husky) program. I currently serve as the President-Elect of the Connecticut State Dental Association.

I am writing this testimony in opposition to HB 5243, An Act Concerning the Use of Mercury in Dentistry.

Silver mercury amalgam dental restorations have been used safely in this country for many, many years. Numerous studies by U.S. public health agencies over many years have repeatedly found that amalgam fillings are safe, and no credible scientific study has ever determined that these restorations are a cause of any adverse health effects or disease, with the exception of the very small segment of the population who may be allergic to one or more of the ingredients in the material. Furthermore, dental amalgam does not contain methylmercury, the type of mercury which is of concern to human's health when consuming seafood.

Because of its ease of use and unique properties, dental amalgam continues to be the best choice of restorative material in certain patients, including handicapped persons, children, and others who cannot control their motor functions. Dental amalgam sets quickly, requires only one step to place (as opposed to multiple steps for tooth colored fillings), can be used in a moist environment (unlike tooth colored restorative materials), is durable and is less costly than alternatives.

In fact, I have such faith in dental amalgam that I recently placed an amalgam restoration in my own twelve year old son! Due to the location of the tooth in need of restoring, the fact that my son is a rather severe gagger, and that the tooth was not yet even fully erupted into his mouth, I felt that the only, and absolute best choice for my own child was an amalgam filling. As one who is scientifically trained, and who makes evidence based decisions, I have no doubt that this is a safe option. If I had any doubts at all as to the safety of this material, would I use it on my own son? For that matter, if I thought that dental amalgam was a dangerous or risky material to use, why in the world would I continue to use it? While I am protecting my patients' health and safety, I assure you that I am also interested in my own health and safety!

As far as environmental issues concerning mercury-containing dental amalgam fillings, the EPA has stated that less than one percent of the mercury released into the environment from human activity comes from dentistry. The American Dental Association's best management practices call for the use of amalgam separators in dental offices, which capture approximately ninety five percent of amalgam waste. Dentists, like most citizens, are concerned about our environment and are utilizing best practices recommended by the American Dental Association to reduce the amount of waste amalgam entering our wastewater. That being said, the key public concern is not mercury from dental waste in sewers and treatment plants, but environmental mercury from coal fired utility plants.

I fully support the right of the patient to choose the best treatment based on available scientific studies. Dental amalgam has proven to be a safe, cost-effective, durable material. Because it is a less expensive option than other filling materials, dental amalgam is an important choice for patients for whom cost is a concern. If this option is not available, some patients may not be able to access the care they need to maintain healthy dentitions.

I urge you to oppose HB 5243. The Connecticut State Dental Association has a wealth of material available for you to use as resources in making your decision as to the safety and efficacy of dental amalgam restorations. Please feel free to contact me at your convenience and I would be happy to help you to find the answers any questions you might have.

Respectfully Submitted,

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