

Testimony to: Senator Terry Gerratana, Representative Susan Johnson, and the Members of the Public Health Committee

In Opposition to: **Raised Bill 6589**

Submitted by: Marcia H. Lorentzen, RDH, MEd, Ed.D.  
**March 20, 2013**

Senator Gerratana, Rep. Johnson, and Members of the Public Health Committee:

I speak in opposition to **HB 6589**, An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study the Scope of Practice for Dental Hygienists.

**The time is right now for establishing the mid-level provider in Connecticut** to address the unmet dental needs in citizens in Connecticut. We do not need to study the scope of practice for dental hygienists as this has been done previously, most notably the Forsyth experiment in the 1940's and between 1965 and 1977. It is all recorded in a book titled, "The Forsyth Experiment," by Dr. Ralph Lobene that was published in 1979. Just the year before, results of a study completed at the University of Iowa were also reported in *The Journal of the American Dental Association* October 1, 1978 vol. 97 no. 4 613-627. This article reports: "the results of the study showed that the dental hygiene students were able to perform selected operative and periodontal procedures at a comparable level to that of senior dental students."

**As Dean of the Fones School of Dental Hygiene, University of Bridgeport, I can assure you that we are fully committed to fulfill the Master's Degree educational plan designed to educate and graduate licensed and qualified candidates for this mid-level oral health practitioner.** The University of Bridgeport Master's Degree in Dental Hygiene program is licensed by the State of Connecticut Department of Higher Education and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to conduct education in four distinct concentrations: Dental Hygiene Education; Dental Public Health; Dental Hygiene Administration/Management; and Dental Hygiene Practice. Although currently we administer the online programs in education and public health, we have the mid-level provider curriculum ready to go.

**The mid-level provider may be called an Advanced Dental Therapist (ADT) or an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner (ADHP);** either name is suitable as they are equal in education and intended scope of practice. Minnesota legislators settled on naming the mid-level provider who is a licensed dental hygienist educated through a two year Master's degree program the Advanced Dental Therapist. The Dental Hygiene Practice curriculum is based on the ADHP curriculum, just as is the Minnesota ADT curriculum. Should you decide that in Connecticut the mid-level provider should be called an Advanced Dental Therapist I would agree to that decision.

The mid-level provider curriculum prepares practitioners to address special oral health needs of priority populations including children, elderly, adults, and those with special needs who will be served in public health settings. The mid-level provider will be a new member of the oral health team who works in collaboration with dentists, not independent from them, to offer more complete array of dental services to more CT residents. **The Advanced Dental Therapist (ADT) is the mid-level provider** which is currently being educated, graduated, and in clinical practice in Minnesota. **The curriculum is based on the Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner (ADHP) curriculum which was promoted by the American Dental Hygienists' Association in 2006** and refined through a series of hearings by vested parties.

The mid-level provider called the Advanced Dental Therapist is so well established in Minnesota that the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) has approved a draft of Accreditation Standards for Dental Therapy Education Programs that address the following areas: **1. Institutional Effectiveness; 2. Educational program; 3. Faculty and Staff; 4. Educational Support Services; and 5. Patient Care Services.** \* The proposed standards are being distributed for comment through December 31, 2013. It should be noted that Standards can NOT be developed until there is a work force in place for which outcomes can be measured. Minnesota will be responding with collected data and outcomes measures in 2014.  
[http://www.ada.org/sections/educationAndCareers/pdfs/proposed\\_dental\\_therapy.pdf](http://www.ada.org/sections/educationAndCareers/pdfs/proposed_dental_therapy.pdf)

It should also be noted that as of February 1, 2013 and reported in the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) Access magazine, **mid-level provider legislation/workforce-related bills** have been introduced in the five additional states: Kansas, New Mexico, Vermont, Washington, and North Dakota. Each of these the mid-level practitioner bills include the career laddering approach for licensed dental hygienists. It is education that meets the career interests of the practicing bachelor degree dental hygienist.

**It is important to make provisions for career laddering for the entire dental team**, not just for the dental assistant as the current SB 993 does. It is advantageous to **amend SB993**, An Act Concerning Dental Assistants and Expanded Function Dental Auxiliary (EFDA), by inserting the language for the mid-level provider offering career-laddering for dental hygienists as was substantially well-presented in the **2012 HB 5541**, An Act Concerning the Establishment of Licensure for an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioner. The ADHP as licensed professional will work as a member of an integrated healthcare team, alongside hygienists, dentists and their assistants in the public health programs currently in operation in Connecticut.

I want to reiterate that the education to the mid-level provider is meant for a licensed bachelor degree dental hygienist and requires two years of graduate education. It is a career laddering plan for dental hygienists, NOT a 6 year educational plan. A review of the education needed may be in order.

Dental hygienists may earn licensure following graduation from a CODA accredited dental hygiene program. CODA approved curriculums must be a minimum of 2 years in length. The professional career choice for an applicant in the two year program is to enter the workforce as a licensed dental hygienist following a minimum of two years of education. The choice is often made to continue one's education to the bachelor's degree for the purpose of entering into an advanced dental hygiene professional role, such as educator, researcher, administrator/manager, advocate, or clinician, all of which have a strong relationship with public health.

This is a career laddering opportunity that provides options for owning a company in products, education, or practice management; other bachelor degree dental hygienists work in research and for such dental and medical companies as Procter and Gamble, Colgate, Ora-Pharma, GSK, and many more. The dental hygienist at a bachelor's degree level has the option of further education in the Master's Degree to advance their opportunities, nurture their love of learning, and be of benefit to others. Graduate degree education for the dental hygienist is expanding.

A two year Master's degree is what has developed and is in place at Metropolitan State University in Minnesota, and is providing an effective ladder opportunity for dental hygienists. Applicants to the program must be licensed dental hygienists in current practice, thus honing the practical skills in the current scope of practice, with a stringent application process. The curriculum at Metropolitan State University is a 44 credit college program available only to qualified applicants. The curriculum we've drafted for the intended mid-level provider tract in the already established Master's Degree in Dental Hygiene at the University of Bridgeport is very similar to the ADT program in Minnesota. We look forward to the full report from the studies being done in Minnesota in order to modify and refine the plans for the program. Success of the ADT in Minnesota is shared at this link:

<http://www.metrostate.edu/msweb/explore/gradstudies/masters/msadt/>

Entering into the MSDH curriculum as a baccalaureate degree educated, experienced, licensed dental hygienist who has vast knowledge of complicated medical histories is a logical progression for advanced dental hygiene practice, expanding the scope of practice commensurate with the proposed educational curriculum. The Advanced Dental Therapist has the extensive experience as a licensed dental hygienist with the compassion for working within the dental health care system to offer more care to the people they see. They have the foundation and licensure to continue with preventive practice and enter into palliative and restorative care as required by the client/patient.

**Please support language that will 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 by amending SB 993 and defeating HB 6589.**

*Marcia H. Lorentzen, RDH, MSED, Ed.D.*

Dean, Fones School of Dental Hygiene  
*The First School of Dental Hygiene*  
University of Bridgeport  
60 Lafayette Street, Room 413  
Bridgeport, CT 06604  
203-576-4139