

Appropriations Committee
Legislative Office
Building 300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford CT 06106

Re: Governors Proposed Orthodontic cuts 2016

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Jeffrey Dixon, and I am an Orthodontist practicing in East Hartford and Simsbury, Connecticut. The purpose of this correspondence is to inform you of the recent cuts in Orthodontic services currently covered by the State of Connecticut Husky program, the further reduction in services that Governor Malloy is proposing, and the effects it will have on the children under the Husky program in Connecticut.

It is important to note that not all children covered under the Husky plan qualify for orthodontic treatment. A prior authorization is required as patients must have a severe and handicapping malocclusion. In more than half of the patients I examine, the minimum qualifying standard for orthodontic treatment is not met based upon our state guidelines. Connecticut uses the Salzmann scale as the measurement system to determine which cases are severe and have a medical necessity. Prior to July 2015, the minimum qualifying score on the Salzmann scale was 24 points. In July 2015, that score was increased by two points to 26. Governor Malloy had asked for a five point increase to 29. There was a compromise in 2015 and instead of a greater than 75% reduction in services a 30% percent reduction was agreed upon and the Salzmann score was increased to the current 26 points saving the state of CT over 2 million dollars per year.

Under the governors' recent proposal, the minimum qualifying score on the Salzmann index will be increased to 29. The governor also proposes that with prior authorization, orthodontic services will be approved for individuals with a score below 29 based on medical necessity. He cites "As a result of this change, the state will no longer cover cases that might otherwise be considered "cosmetic."

The only change the governor is proposing is a change in the Salzmann index minimum qualifying score from 26-29 as patients with medical necessity that score under a 26 are currently approved for Orthodontic treatment. It's not as if this is being added as a new standard.

The photos attached are of actual patients who did not qualify under the old 24 point cut off. Clearly esthetics has already been accounted for when these patients were scored under the Husky system as these patients have severe cosmetic issues and did not qualify for Orthodontic treatment. It's very clear that severe esthetic issues not approved under the old 24 point system were because they were deemed to not have a medical necessity. So the notion that changing the score to 29 would somehow result in excluding those cases that would otherwise be considered as cosmetic is wrong.

In addition the closest state that uses the Salzmann scale to determine the severity of malocclusions is PA. They require a 25 minimum qualifying score.

What is really happening is the definition of medical necessity is changing based upon economics, not based upon science or the opinions of the Orthodontists in the state who are actually treating patients.

Patient #1 Salzmann Score 21



Patient #2 Salzmann Score 23



Patient #3
Salzmann Score 9



Patient #4 Salzmann Score 23



The rationale for providing orthodontic treatment to the children of Connecticut is very simple: teeth that are aligned properly last longer. Patients that have overall better occlusion and alignment tend to have less dental problems, less bullying in school and greater self-esteem. The patient population that would benefit the most from orthodontic treatment is unfortunately the population that cannot afford it.

The current budget for orthodontic treatment in Connecticut is approximately 5 million which is down from 7 million last year. Governor Malloy now wants another 3 million dollars in cuts. If this happens, hundreds of children will go without the orthodontic care they need. According to my calculations, nearly 162 children per month were starting comprehensive orthodontic care prior to July 2015. With the recent cuts, that number is now 111 per month. If another 3 million dollars is cut only 46 children a month in Connecticut will receive care.

If the Salzmann minimum qualifying score is further increased, I believe there will be a greater access to care problem all over Connecticut. Reimbursement rates are already very low at less than 60% of usual fees. Medicaid cases are already very difficult to treat as only severe cases qualify and these patients take much longer to treat with much less reimbursement when compared to the typical private paying Orthodontic patient. Increasing the minimum qualifying score will compound this problem. I currently have patients drive from Litchfield County to receive care in my Simsbury office as no one will accept Husky insurance where these patients live. In fact as of last year one Orthodontist in Avon CT and one in Torrington stopped accepting Husky patients. Finally, there are many practices in the state that are deriving most of their revenues from Husky. I believe if further cuts happen it will force these practices to close. This will make access to care even more difficult for our patients.

Finally In 2000, the Greater Hartford Legal Aid and Connecticut Legal Services filed a federal class action lawsuit on behalf of Connecticut children enrolled in HUSKY. The lawsuit contended the state of CT was failing to provide payments at a level adequate to attract a sufficient number of Dental and other Dental providers (Orthodontists) to allow Connecticut Medicaid recipients the same access to dental care enjoyed by the general population. I believe the changes the Governor is proposing will lead to the same access to care issues for our Orthodontic patients.

Best regards,


Jeffrey Dixon DDS, MS