

Connecticut General Assembly - Public Health Committee
Legislative Office Building
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

**Testimony of the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition
February 24, 2016**

**In Support of H.B. 5350: AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH'S RECOMMENDATIONS ON FLUORIDATION OF THE
PUBLIC WATER SUPPLY**

Dear Senator Gerrantana, Representative Ritter, and members of the Public Health Committee:

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) fully supports H.B. 5350, an act that aligns with the United States Department of Health and Human Services' most recent recommendation for optimal fluoride levels in drinking water to prevent tooth decay.

Fluoride is absolutely essential in promoting effective oral health practices. This mineral occurs naturally in most water systems, but often at levels too low to prevent tooth decay. Thusly, it has been added to community's water systems for the past 70 years to reach an optimal level that prevents tooth decay. Thousands of research studies have shown that water fluoridation is safe, inexpensive, and prevents at least 25% of tooth decay in children and adults over a lifespan. In fact, the cost to fluoridate water over one person's lifespan is less than the cost to treat one cavity. Located in one of Connecticut's poorest cities, this is a critical fact to be aware of as it is our most needy and vulnerable families who will suffer the most if fluoridation is not kept to its recommended levels in our state's public water supply.

Client testimony:

My name is J. Sierra. I am a 34 year-old woman from Bridgeport, CT. I am a single mother of two teenage daughters and an 8 year old son. As a child, I ate absolutely nothing but cereal, and many other junk foods. I rarely ate a well-balanced meal. My parents were struggling and my dad was the only one employed, so we ate whatever was available. I remember going to the Health Department in the City of New York. I visited the dentist quite frequently because I always complained about pain in my mouth and the pain was due to cavities I developed, sometimes two and three at a time. Going to the dentist became routine but it was also very painful. When I was about 11 years-old, my parents decided to move to Bridgeport, CT.

After a few years of living in CT, I was about 14-15 years old, my dad found decent employment that provided health and dental insurance which was a

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blessing in the sky because both my teeth and my gums were in really bad shape. Finally, a dental appointment. However, it was a little too late. I had three teeth that had decayed so bad that they needed to be pulled and I also needed two root canals. I was in such agony when they pulled the teeth out and the thought of having to go back for three sessions for the root canals was just devastating. I was also diagnosed with a severe case of gingivitis. One month later, I went back for the root canal and this time I was informed that the teeth were in such poor condition that the root canal would not help and that I would be better off pulling the teeth in order to ease the pain. As time went by, my teeth just deteriorated slowly but surely.

It was really tough being in high school and having to cover my face/mouth when I spoke or smiled because I had many teeth missing. It was also difficult finding a summer job. I became pregnant at the age of 20 with my first child and throughout my pregnancy I lost the rest of my teeth leaving me with no other option but the need for dentures. I was devastated because I was so young. I wondered, "How I was going to find a job? Will I ever date again? Will Medicaid even cover the dentures?" I knew I needed help in restoring my smile again.

I called a local community health center and made an appointment with the dental clinic and after being examined, I was informed that the HUSKY program covered services such as the one I desperately needed. A couple of months later after being fitted for my dentures, both upper and lower, I was able to smile again. I went from NO teeth, and infected gums to feeling absolutely wonderful about myself. Now I feel like I can conquer the world, I feel confident about myself and my smile. I now take very good care of my grandkids teeth and make sure they brush and floss twice a day so they never have to experience what I did as a young teenager and young adult.

J. Sierra's story is just one of many affected by poor oral health, and the need for fluoridation in our water to prevent tooth decay. Although dental caries (tooth decay) is largely preventable, it remains the most common chronic disease of children aged 5 to 17 years. In Connecticut, tooth decay affects:

- 1 out of 5 children, ages 3- 5 years
- 2 out of 5 children, ages 6 – 9 years

Poor dental health has significant consequences. Research shows that children with abysmal oral health are nearly three times more likely to miss school and are four times more likely to earn lower grades. Oral health is directly connected to the overall health of children and adults, and no reputable study published has given legitimacy, or shown linkage, between fluoride and adverse health conditions. As a member of the Public Health Committee, you share our concern for oral health care measures that affect us all. BCAC urges you to support this very important measure that will ensure healthier children and adults in our state.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to the health of all Connecticut citizens.