Senator Gerratana, Senator Somers and Representative Steinberg and Members of the Public Health Committee, my name is Dr. David Fried. I have been practicing general dentistry in Wallingford for 25 years. Prior to that, I was in the US Air Force as a general dentist. I am a retired LT Col from the CT Army National Guard, having served for 20 years as the State Dentist. I am the Vice President of the Connecticut State Dental Assoc. My volunteer service to the citizens of our state includes 10 years with CT-MOM, as well as being a HUSKY/Medicaid provider. I also volunteer my time as a clinical faculty member in the UCONN Department of Restorative Dentistry.

I am here to testify in opposition to SB 40 – An Act Concerning the Certification of Dental Therapists.

I wanted to call the committee’s attention to the fact that there are no CODA approved programs in this country as of yet. There are only a couple of states like Alaska, Minnesota and Maine that allow dental therapists, but those states have nothing in common with Connecticut. They are very rural. With lots of wide open spaces in between centers of population. They also have shortages of all kinds of professions in rural areas. In Connecticut, there are no shortages of dentists or of hygienists, and we have solved the issues of HUSKY by making CT a leader in oral health care. This has been duly noted by PEW. It is important for the committee to note that CODA (Committee on Dental Accreditation) only evaluates academic programs. Not institutions and not graduates. There are no standards for certificates or licensure. There is currently no regulatory body with oversight responsibilities focused on quality of care standards that might be associated with a
dental therapist. The State would need to develop and implement an entirely new process of examinations in order for Dental Therapists to demonstrate clinical competency and ensure patient safety. Scope of practice is also within the purview of each state, not CODA.

It is your duty to determine how to determine and measure competency of training institutions and finally of its graduates. Those guidelines have not been established, and if you approve this type of provider, you will be responsible for that. There are currently no guidelines for licensing and proving competency. This will cost money which the state of Connecticut does not have. Without any clear-cut evidence that we need this kind of practitioner in the state of Connecticut for the few individuals who might want to go into this unproven profession, is it worth the cost to ensure that the public is safe? What about the students who have taken a leap of faith and incurred student debt, hoping that this career path is even viable. The track records of New Zealand, Canada, Alaska, Minnesota Maine and Vermont have failed.

I am volunteer clinical instructor at UCONN School of Dental Medicine, and I am educating the cream of the crop. They are amongst the best students in the world with the highest IQs, board scores and motivation. I start with them during their second year of dental school, preparing and filling plastic teeth. I work with them in the clinics for the third and fourth years. I watch them as they struggle through what some would call simple dental procedures. I also escort them to Honduras for a week where they can practice their skills. I watch these competent students struggle to be able to come out of school and pass their licensing boards and treat patients at the same proficiency as a dentist who has been providing care for 20-30 years. It is very difficult to get to that level. I invite you to visit the school and observe the difficulty in learning how to complete “simple procedures”. It is not that easy. To think that we can fast track providers into a second tier of professional providing the same procedures as a Dentist with a third of the education time, is a dangerous concept. We have very sophisticated patients here in Connecticut and demand a certain proficiency of provider. We are not in the backwoods of Alaska made or Montana we're talking about a state where you can drive from one end to the other passing by over 1000 dentists in the course of an hour. We have enough dentists here in Connecticut to provide care for anybody who needs care as we have proven by becoming one of the best states in the country providing care to children on our husky program.

There has been discussion that the position of a Dental Therapist is a place for women to advance in the Dental field, but considering that women have been
approximately 50% of the dental class at UConn for over 30 years, I really do not see that as an issue. Unfortunately, you cannot legislate knowledge and training. You can only encourage pursuit of knowledge through education. Many of the States, including New York, have mandated advance training and residencies in order to apply for a dental license because they feel it protects the public to have more qualified professions. Dental Education is very limited, even after four years, and additional training is required before Dentists are allowed to practice on their citizens. At this point, we should be advocating for the same requirement in Connecticut to protect our citizens and provide a better level of care. Even this State, through the Public Health Committee, have realized that Medicine and Allied fields are much more complicated than in the past. Consequently, Physical Therapy and Pharmacy are now PHD level professions.

For these reasons, the CSDA cannot support this bill and I urge your opposition to SB 40. Connecticut does not need to be the leader in this arena. The dental therapist did not graduate dental school, and has at least 2 years less training than a dentist. Ask yourself the tough question: Would YOU want to go to a dental therapist for an irreversible surgical procedure (tooth extraction and filling)?

I would like to sincerely thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Respectfully Submitted,

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