From: Dr. Albert Natelli  
145 Meriden Avenue  
Southington, Ct 06489

Dear Senator Gerratana, Senator Somers, Representative Steinberg, and Members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Dr. Albert Natelli. I have been practicing general dentistry in Southington, Connecticut for over 20 years. In addition, for the record, I am also a part time volunteer instructor of dentistry at the University Of Connecticut School Of Dental Medicine, an advisory member to the Lincoln College Dental Assisting program, a former Town Councilor in the Town of Southington, and former candidate for State Representative in the 81st District. I have also been involved in treating patients at the CT-MOM event over the years and I have even had my wife join us at CT-MOM as she is a nurse and help medically screen patients at the event. Also, I work closely with our social Services Department here in Southington in treating local community members, either pro-bono, reduced fees or by accepting Medicaid as well as having a small nursing home practice. I am writing to oppose SB 40 – An Act Concerning the Certification of Dental Therapists. Finally, please permit me to note that my testimony here reflects my individual opinion and not the opinion or position of any entity, including that of the University Of Connecticut School Of Dental Medicine.

In 2016, the Connecticut State Legislature passed a law creating a new designation of dental assistant – Expanded Function Dental Assistants. This person can be Certified Dental Assistant or Dental Hygienists who have successfully completing the requirements set up by the EFDA Standards Committee and will be able to perform a variety of restorative procedures. The EFDA Standards Committee (of which CSDA is a member) is in the process of developing a curriculum and the competencies for the newly designated position. The Commissioner of Public Health must approve of the curriculum. When a curriculum is established and adopted by CODA accredited dental assisting schools, candidates can begin the process of achieving EFDA credentials. The earliest the EFDA Standards Committee will complete its charge is the Fall of 2017. Time is needed for the EFDA program to get underway.

If any of you or your colleagues is worried about access to care in Connecticut and think a mid-level provider is the answer, please note the following, Connecticut is a national leader in providing dental care to children enrolled in Medicaid. According to data from the Connecticut Dental Health Partnership, the administrator of the state’s dental Medicaid (HUSKY) program, there is no shortage of dentists in Connecticut. There are more than 1,800 dental providers participating in the HUSKY program. Every HUSKY Health client in the state has at least two dentists within 20 miles of their home and 99.2% of HUSKY health clients have access to at least 2 providers with 10 miles of their home. In addition Pew ranks Connecticut as one of the Top 5 states with Dental Medicaid utilization. For these reasons alone the conversation should be over but none the less it continues.

Yogi Berra once answered a question with the following response, “… this is déjà vu all over again.” One could say this is true for S.B. 40 An Act Concerning the Certification of Dental Therapists. Some of the members of this committee may recall seeing similar bills presented in the past:

- In 2009 (HB 5630) the bill was proposed in the Public Health Committee failing to be called for a vote.
- In 2010 (HB 5355) the bill was raised in the Human Services Committee, made it out of Committee and went no further.
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- In 2011 (HB 5616) the bill was again raised in the Human Services Committee, again made it out of Committee, but again failed to garner enough support for it to be reviewed by the Committee that has cognizance over scope issues, Public Health.
- In 2012 (HB5541) the bill failed to make it out of the Public Health Committee.

These were discussed, debated and voted on in a variety of ways and did not pass. In addition, a process overseen by the Program Review and Investigations Committee, was conducted by the Department of Public Health. With the following conclusion:

"Although it seems conceivable that the creation and utilization of a mid-level oral health provider ... has the potential to enhance access to quality and affordable health care in CT primarily through increased utilization, there was no documented current practice data provided to support this theory. Data provided by the Department of Social Services suggests that access is no longer an issue for the CT Medicaid population; utilization is the problem."

Due to the lack of additional information to support the creation of a mid-level provider in Connecticut, SB-40 is redundant and serves no purpose other than to waste valuable state resources.

This leads me into State resources. Connecticut continues to lag behind the nation with regards to job creation, high taxes, the cost of living and more. We have companies leaving the state because we do not offer what they need to be competitive and grow. Before thinking about spending any of mine, my families, my friends, my staffs and my colleagues taxes (remember our taxes are used to pay your salaries and the costs associated with this) on this I would ask that you consider the budget, the budget deficits, the new proposal put forth by the governor and Department of Social Services regarding the cuts to Medicaid funding and more. There are costs associated with beginning and designing another new program. Expanding the scope of practice of dental hygienists beyond what is called for in the recently passed EFDA legislation will incur additional cost to the state. State agencies will be required to develop and implement an entirely new process of examinations to demonstrate clinical competency and ensure patient safety for the new classification of Dental Therapists. Finally, an entirely new process for granting licensure for this new dental provider classification will fall upon state agencies and staff who have already limited resources. This Senate Bill Proposal that has no language associated with it. Will this be Connecticut’s Affordable Care Act moment and the Representative from California Nancy Pelosi quote “…we have to pass the bill so that you can find out what is in it, away from the fog of the controversy.”

As a former Town Councilor and candidate for state representative, I must say I am extremely disappointed that this committee will consider this proposal when there is no language in the bill and more importantly a multibillion dollar deficit in the state budget. Spending money on something like this now is wrong. If we were to spend money it should be on reducing the debt and then infrastructure public safety and schools. We should be looking to spend money to get people back to work. Please be responsible to the people and towns you serve and spend our money wisely. In closing, I would like to again respectfully thank the members of the Public Health Committee for allowing me to submit this testimony and would urge you to oppose this bill and any additional dental mid-level provider bill or amendment. Feel free to contact me at 860-628-0385 if I may answer any questions for you.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Al Natelli