Having served eighteen years on the Public Health Committee, I am familiar with scope of practice issues. Connecticut began discussing establishing the concept of a dental therapist in 2005. At that time Connecticut, as the birthplace of dental hygiene, would have been the first state to establish a mid-level provider. Opposition was based on reluctance to be first. It is now thirteen years later, and we are still discussing instead of acting.

In 2009 Minnesota was the first state to authorize dental therapists followed by Maine and Vermont. Oregon, Washington, and Alaska have authorized the dental therapist on tribal lands.

The dental therapist model is supported by the WK Kellogg Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, and the Federal Trade Commission. A literature search yields numerous articles documenting the need for and efficacy of the dental therapist model.

I am asking the Public Health Committee to include the language developed in cooperation with the Department of Public Health when determining final language to the dental bills to be considered for a joint favorable report.

Reasons to support inclusion of dental therapist language include:

**JOBS** - Creation of a dental therapist will create a career ladder in the dental hygiene profession that will open up jobs as some practicing dental hygienists seek dental therapy positions and students choose dental therapy and without any cost to our state. Creating jobs at no cost to the state is the best of all worlds!

**PROVIDING STUDENT OPPORTUNITY** - Students who live in the state and are attracted to the state because of dental therapy are more likely to stay in Connecticut. We all know that Connecticut needs to attract young people and keep them here by providing them with as much opportunity as possible.

**SUPPORTING WOMEN** – Ninety five percent of dental hygienists are women. They are being denied career advancement by virtue of having less money and power than the opposition and the outmoded belief that control of one profession should be exercised by another.

**FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION** - In comments to the Commission on Dental Accreditation, the FTC states that a dental therapist can greatly improve access to quality dental care. National recognition of this emerging profession would increase the supply of practitioners who can provide basic dental services safely and effectively commensurate with their education training and experience.

A greater supply of qualified providers would enhance competition, which can yield lower prices, additional service hours, shorter wait times and innovations in health care delivery as we have seen from increased use of advanced practice nurses and physicians assistants.

In October of 2017 the FTC provided comments to the Ohio legislature, stating that licensure of dental therapists could benefit consumers by enhancing competition, reducing prices, and expanding access to dental services. They further encouraged that the dental therapist be used in both public and private practice settings.

The opposition arguments remain the same and yet there has been growing support for dental therapy and the data have confirmed that dental therapists can practice cost effectively and increase access.
Nurse practitioners and physician’s assistants were originally opposed by the medical community. Today they are an integral part of the health care workforce and partner with physicians to provide quality health care. I predict we will be saying the same thing about dental therapists and dentists once they have the opportunity to work together.

Connecticut has always been an innovative state. The dental therapist is about innovation and developing new workforce models. Allow the state that established dental hygiene over 100 years ago to be a leader again.

Please provide Connecticut consumers with the benefit of competition, increased access to care in underserved communities and a choice of providers by including dental therapist language in revisions being considered in determining bills that will be recommended for a joint favorable report by your committee.

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