

**Testimony to Public Health Committee – Toni Parlanti, RDH  
HB 7281 An Act Concerning the Practice of Dental Therapy by Licensed Dental Hygienists and HB 7303 An Act Concerning the Recommendations by the Department of Public Health Regarding Dental Practitioners**

My name is Toni Marie Parlanti. I represent a staff of Registered Dental Hygienists employed by the Health Department of a large municipality. It wasn't until I accepted this position, 13 years ago, that I truly understood and dealt with, first hand, a population with limited access to care, having worked 21 years prior in an affluent Connecticut private practice. Our program provides much needed dental services in the schools. **I speak in favor of HB 7281 and HB 7303** because they would expand access to oral health care for thousands of low-income families who seek healthcare from public health facilities.

Our program includes screening and referral for 12,000 elementary and middle school students, educational programs, sealant placement and clinical preventive and treatment services. We treat HUSKY insured children as well as the uninsured. Some families opt to use our services because they no longer can afford the high cost of dental premiums or co-pays. Due to our intense efforts in the area of preventive services, our rate of referral has decreased over the years. However, the treatment rate never changes-it remains at about 49%.

Some may argue that there are enough providers to meet the needs of underserved populations; however, getting a child to the actual treatment site often requires intense case management, as many of the families we care for have complex lives and face multiple barriers to utilizing care. The ideal setting to provide services to low-income families is in schools where children attend, neighborhood community clinics where families live or mobile clinics that travel to the clients. These sites reduce barriers to care such as transportation and time away from work and school. A dental therapist provides an affordable alternative for non-profit public health facilities to deliver care. We all are well aware that our school based clinics and public health facilities operate on shoestring budgets, funding is scarce and capacity is limited.

Prevention and early intervention are key to decreasing missed school days, the risk of infections and trips to the emergency room as well as decreasing the cost of oral health care. A dental therapist who is licensed as a dental hygienist will be able to provide a full range of primary prevention and early treatment. The concept is built on the fundamental education and philosophy of prevention and access to care that Dr. Alfred Civilian Fones envisioned and developed for Dental Hygiene in Bridgeport over 100 years ago.

Our CT Department of Public Health has submitted this Bill and agrees the time has come to create a dental therapist. I thank you for reading my testimony. I am a health care advocate. Today, I advocate for the many children and families who will benefit from the much needed mid-level provider.

Respectfully submitted,

Toni Marie Parlanti, RDH