

March 13, 2019

Dear Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Lesser, Representative Young, Senator Somers, Representative Petit and Public Health Committee Members;

My name is Miranda Peralta and I am a registered dental hygienist providing preventive dental care in the public sector at a local Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in Meriden where I also live. I also currently serve as President of The American Dental Hygienists' Association of Connecticut (ADHA-CT). There are currently over 3,000 dental hygienists licensed to practice in Connecticut and four dental hygiene schools with over 200 students.

I am here to ask for your support of Dental Therapy in Connecticut as stated in HB7281 & HB7303 Sections 4 & 5 proposed by DPH). We have provided you with comparison and fact sheets on Dental Therapy.

In recent years, our association, ADHA-CT, has participated in the Scope of Review Process and Working Group Meetings in CT. We also testified and worked in cooperation with The Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) on dental therapy standards to include a dental hygiene based dental therapist; allowing Dental Therapy programs to develop and pursue options that provide flexibility to individual states. This collaborative effort reflects the populations' needs by embracing a provider already well established in preventive oral health. The public will be better served and a dental therapist will **foster continuous improvement and professional growth** of an already dedicated, existing and licensed workforce. CODA has agreed and this option is now part of their standards.

According to the Bureau of Health, Workforce Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, the following was reported for Connecticut: (data as of 12/31/18) ALL 8 CONNECTICUT COUNTIES HAVE DENTAL Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) and these Dental HPSAs in CT are overwhelmingly designated as NON-RURAL. **Dental HPSAs are access to care indicators.** There are 37 Dental Care HPSA Designations in CT; with a population of 395,968. 101 Practitioners would be needed to remove HPSA Designation;
https://ersrs.hrsa.gov/ReportServer?/HGDW_Reports/BCD_HPSA/BCD_HPSA_SCR50_Qtr_Smry_HTML&rc:Toolbar=false
On a personal note, since 1993, HRSA reports Meriden, where I live and work, with a population of over 60,000 residents as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA).

Implementing the proven safe and effective Dental Therapy model in Connecticut will help public dental clinics and FQHC's, like the one I work in, and others throughout the state. Adding dental therapists to the dental workforce will address provider shortages thereby increasing access to needed dental care and helping to conserve resources in the public health system. Patients will receive needed care and facilities benefit through advanced innovations in health care delivery.

Creating the dental therapist model will bring job opportunities to Connecticut as well. There are already many dental hygienists providing mobile dental hygiene services to our school children and Head Start attendees. By adding dental therapists these children can continue to receive preventative services but also will provide the opportunity to receive dental restoration services they desperately need.

I can assure you, my experience at the FQHC where I currently work, has proved to me that dental access issues continue to exist in Connecticut, especially in my own city. Dental therapists will reduce barriers to access by providing on-site services in school-based clinics where dental hygienists are already working. I have personally seen, as recent as this week, children who have unresolved dental caries dating back over 1 year ago and some much longer. When I ask the parents what is preventing them from having their child's teeth restored more often the answer has to do with not having the time to leave work during business hours for dental appointments. Having dental therapists in these school-based clinics breaks down this barrier for parents and caregivers. It also prevents children from missing critical school time for dental appointments.

Dental therapists are not meant to take the place of a dentist but will serve as a mid-level provider, similar to an APRN in the medical field. Complex cases would always be referred to a dentist. As dental hygienists we currently work

collaboratively with dentists and other health professionals to meet the needs of our patients. Dental therapy will add an additional provider level to enhance the dental workforce in Connecticut.

I thank you, for your time and support of Dental Therapy for Connecticut residents.

Sincerely,

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