

Statement of Pam Sylvestri , RDH, MSDH
Public Health Committee
House Bill 7281 and House Bill 7303

Sen. Abrams, Rep. Steinberg, Sen. Somers, Rep. Petit and members of the committee:

My name is Pam Sylvestri and I am writing to you in support of Proposed House Bill 7281, An Act Concerning the Practice of Dental Therapy by Licensed Dental Hygienists. I am a dental hygienist and have practiced in various public health settings for more than 30 years. I currently work for the State of CT, Department of Developmental Services.

There continues to be underserved populations here in CT. I treat patients from all over the state including Windham County, New London County, Hartford County, Middlesex County and Tolland County. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) typically have poor oral hygiene and a large percentage of these individuals have untreated decay. We have heard from family members and staff of some of the individuals who have been forced to seek treatment in the community. One individual who has acquired her disability as a result of domestic violence saw a community dentist for a small filling on an upper front tooth. Due to difficulty swallowing, and an inability to lie back for treatment, the patient was informed that they would not see her again. When our office called to speak to the supervising dentist of the clinic, the dentist reiterated that the dentists are not required to stand to perform dentistry and this patient could not be treated there in the future. I have not sat down to treat a patient in the past 9 years.

The CT Department of Public Health, Office of Oral Health, published “Every Smile Counts, The Oral Health of Connecticut’s Children” in 2012 as a follow up to the report previously released in 2007. The report in its entirety can be found on the ct.gov/dph website. Some of the key findings in the 2012 report were that “dental decay continues to be a significant public health problem for CT’s children, many children in CT do not get the dental care they need,” and “there are significant oral health disparities in CT with minority and low-income children having the highest level of dental disease.”(p. 3) The report goes on to state that the results of the 2012 statistics are through dental screenings without radiographs or other diagnostic tools so “it is safe to assume that some problems were missed and that the numbers may underestimate the

proportion of children needing dental care.”(p. 5) The statistics quoted in the 2012 and 2007 reports are comparable and I find it disturbing that in 5 years the statistics showed no improvement.

Adding a dental therapist to the dental team in public health settings would greatly increase access to care. I completed my Master’s degree in May 2018 to be prepared for a transition into a dental therapy program. I am personally and professionally interested in becoming a dental therapist in order to provide more comprehensive treatment to individuals I currently serve. I implore you to support the implementation of the Dental Therapist in the State of Connecticut allowing more comprehensive treatment for not only patients with IDD within our department but for all individuals who have difficulty obtaining dental treatment.