Bill No.: HB-7303
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH REGARDING DENTAL PRACTITIONERS.
Vote Date: 4/1/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/13/2019
File No.: 

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
The Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:
This bill would modify laws regarding dental practitioners by:
1. Restricting the use of human subjects in clinical and practice examinations by dental licensure applicants by July 1, 2021
2. Enabling out-of-state dental practitioners to obtain licensure without examination if they meet certain standards and have worked for at least one year
3. Establishing a “dental therapy” license for dental hygienists who meet certain qualifications
4. Requiring the chairpersons of the Public Health Committee to assemble a working group to guide the committee on the Department of Public Health’s certification of advanced dental therapists
5. Enabling dentists and dental hygienists to replace eight hours of volunteer practice with one hour of continuing education requirements
6. Expanding the list of procedures that dentists may delegate to qualified dental assistants
7. Providing more time for assistants to pass the infection control examination
8. Enabling dentists to test for diabetes in individuals who are at risk, but not yet diagnosed

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:
Commissioner Raul Pino, Department of Public Health (DPH): DPH speaks in strong support of this legislation. This bill establishes a post graduate residency (PGY1) as a primary requirement for licensure as a dentist. This will standardize the licensure process and
align it with a similar process used by physicians. Existing statute calls for passing one of the regional practical examinations; this will remain in effect, so as not to exclude dentists currently seeking licensure in that manner. The PGY1 addition addresses ethical concerns regarding the use of human subjects during practical examinations. The American Dental Association is expected to create a new examination that does not require the use of human subjects by 2020; therefore, the current practical examination will continue to be accepted through 2021 or upon the new examination’s approval by the Dental Commission. This bill would also enable DPH to provide licensure to a dentist licensed for at least one year and in good standing in a state with similar licensure qualifications, without requiring them to take the practical examination. This would enable out-of-state dentists to follow the PGY1 guidelines, thereby not discouraging trained professionals from practicing in Connecticut. In addition, this legislation authorizes dental therapists to expand available dental services through collaboration with dentists. Finally, this bill expands and defines continuing education requirements to meet the needs of the public.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Dr. R. Lamont MacNeil, Professor and Dean Emeritus, University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine: In addition to his position at the University of Connecticut, Dr. MacNeil is the Chair of the Board of the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) and a member of the executive committee of the Coalition for Modernizing Dental Licensure. UConn School of Dental Medicine is the only dental school in Connecticut and is responsible for educating over 1600 doctors in dental medicine (DMDs) and over 900 specialty physicians. The School of Dental Medicine offers strong support for this legislation. This bill establishes two pathways to obtain licensure: a continuation of the existing curriculum or the ability to take an examination. In providing these options, it serves two significant roles. This bill preserves the existing curriculum for licensure, which is a four year postgraduate residency that focuses on clinical care and patient treatment and management. While this option provides greater formal training time and greater access to patients, there are not enough residency positions available for all dental school graduates in the United States. This second option to take an examination reduces some of that concern, as degrees can still be obtained despite accessibility restrictions. In addition to the examination option, UConn is in support of the bill’s intent to restrict the use of human subjects during the practical examination. Three major national associations have joined the Coalition for Modernizing Dental Licensure in their support of phasing out the use of individuals during a practical examination. Dr. MacNeil attached an amendment for section 2, regarding time restraints on phasing out the use of human subjects, and respectfully requests that the committee review it (see testimony).

Miranda Peralta, President, The American Dental Hygienists’ Association of Connecticut (ADHA-CT): Ms. Peralta supports sections 4 and 5 of this bill, as proposed by the Department of Public Health (DPH). A collaborative relationship between dental therapists and dental hygienists, as outlined in the bill, provides greater access and expands healthcare options. As of December 2018, all eight counties in the state are designated as Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA). These designations measure access to care indicators. Establishing the Dental Therapy model, as proposed in this bill, will assist dental clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) by alleviating shortages and increasing access to healthcare. This will especially be helpful in school-based settings, where students may struggle to find timely, convenient dental services. Additionally, this
model will increase the number of available jobs in the state. Dental therapists will not be taking the place of dental hygienists; they will simply act as “mid-level providers,” similar to APRNs.

Mary Moran Boudreau, former Executive Director, Connecticut Oral Health Initiative: Ms. Boudreau supports this bill, with some suggestions. This legislation will help expand access to dental care in Connecticut by reducing the cost of care and minimizing the “lack of culturally competent care.” In Section 4, Subsection 1, Ms. Boudreau would like to see the addition of “administration of nitrous oxide,” to ensure that patients are receiving the proper anesthetic and pain treatment. In Section 4, Subsection 4, she offers a few recommendations. In regard to subsection (b), Ms. Boudreau notes that the Department of Public Health should provide licenses for dental therapists, as they do Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN). Licensure is critical to patient safety and to assist the state in tracking the number and credentials of dental therapists. In terms of subsection (c), she states that a dental therapist should be allowed to practice without the supervision of a dentist, as long as they complete their education and 1000 clinical hours successfully. Similarly, Ms. Boudreau questions the standard of dentist supervision outlined in Section 8.

Marie Paulis, Director, Dental Hygiene Program at the University of New Haven: The Dental Therapist model is a safe and effective way to expand healthcare services in the state. Currently, there are three states that approve of this practice and nine states that are considering this option. Approximately 10-11% of Connecticut residents live in poverty; this legislation would help them receive the dental treatment they need and deserve. Federal data indicates that 40% of adults across the country have not seen a dentist in the last year and 20% of seniors have untreated cavities. Ms. Paulis noted that while this option is fairly new in the United States, there are currently over 54 countries that have approved the Dental Therapist model. The use of dental therapists raises a great deal of revenue and saves on Medicaid expenses. Studies conducted in Minnesota show that this model provides financial, medical, and social benefits to the public.

Dr. David Fried, President, Connecticut State Dental Association (CSDA): Dr. Fried supports this legislation with a few recommendations. This bill ensures that patients are receiving quality care and would expand access to healthcare in Connecticut. In regard to PGY1 outlined in Sections 1 and 2, Dr. Fried is in support. He notes that the CSDA would actually support a mandatory PGY1 program as currently implemented in New York. In terms of Section 4, the CSDA largely supports the language regarding dental therapy. Dr. Fried notes that the Committee may be skeptical of the Association’s support, considering their position historically; however, the CSDA has remained consistent in their position that they would consider an additional dental workforce in the state. The CSDA believes that the Dental Therapist model could work, with some changes. While the Association opposes the requirement of a dental hygiene license, they support the establishment of an additional educational pathway and a limited scope of practice. Finally, the Association believes that the clinical requirement should be greater than 1,000 hours.

Dr. Jonathan Knapp, Co-Chair, Connecticut State Dental Association’s Legislative Council: Dr. Knapp has held a number of positions in the field, including the Chair of the American Dental Association’s Council on Dental Practice. He supports this bill, with modifications to Section 4 regarding dental therapists. Currently, the language states that a dental therapist must become a dental hygienist and obtain a hygiene license. Dr. Knapp
opposes this requirement, and urges that the bill outline training standards of dental therapists according to the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA). CODA researched this diligently and determined that a hygiene degree or license was not required. The two professions require different skill sets, and in order to truly benefit the state, there must be an adjustment to the cost curve. Therefore, it is unnecessary to require additional expenses for education and certification. Dr. Knapp also suggested the creation of a study to examine the outcomes of the program.

8 other individuals submitted testimony in support of HB 7303, with 4 individuals expressing similar suggestions regarding Section 4.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None submitted.

Reported by: Meagan Schantz             Date: 4/15/19