



March 12, 2021

Dear Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Somers, Representative Petit, Senator Lesser, Representative Wood, Senator Hwang and Representative Pavalock-D'Amato, and Members of the Public Health, and Insurance and Real Estate Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony **SUPPORTING** SB 1022 with an amendment and HB 5596. As Associate Professor, Director of the Fones School of Dental Hygiene, University of Bridgeport, Legislative Chair, Board Trustee of the American Dental Hygienists' Association-Connecticut (ADHA-CT) and a dental hygienist for over 37 years, I ask you to support SB 1022 and HB 5596 regarding telehealth.

I am asking for a friendly amendment to SB 1022, to include dental hygienists along with the many other health professionals. Dental hygienists are the preventive specialists in dentistry; allowing our profession to deliver care via telehealth is essential in providing needed care and will increase access to oral health care to citizens. Telehealth is a protected system of communication whereby providers communicate via electronic communication technology that may include video, imaging consultation, treatment and transfer of patient information.

COVID 19 brought telehealth to the forefront and provided necessary communication, assessment, diagnosis and treatment modalities in a pandemic when it was impossible for health providers to meet "live" with their patients in need. However, telehealth has been used in many states as a necessary modality in everyday care even prior to COVID-19. If one can find a "silver lining" of covid, it is the fact that telehealth is now a "buzz word" in legislatures across the country and is a welcome result as it makes total sense.

Realize, however, that telehealth should and must be used beyond a pandemic; it is now in the forefront of being essential to health and care. The American Dental Association created a policy statement on Telehealth in 2015, and it has become the Standard of quality care in dentistry which details protocols and standards related to telehealth in dentistry.¹ I applaud our state for considering telehealth as the concept is not a new one; approximately 20 states currently utilize dental telehealth (teledentistry) and utilizes a critical assessment provider, the dental hygienist. Dentists agree that in addition to their practice of telehealth that their hygienists are an integral part of this added practice to provide access to care.

For instance, patients who are in nursing homes can be easily treated via teledentistry. 42 states allow dental hygienists to practice direct access. According to the American Dental Hygienists' Association, direct access is the ability for the hygienists to initiate treatment based on their assessment without the specific authorization of a dentist, treat the patient without the presence of a dentist and maintain a provider/patient relationship.² Connecticut has been a direct access state since 2008. It has been shown that a broader scope of practice for the hygienist can significantly improve oral health outcomes.² Dental hygienists are able to practice teledentistry given direct access and general supervision in our state.

8 states reimburse for synchronous (live) teledentistry services and 5 states reimburse for asynchronous teledentistry services.³ The American Dental Association added teledentistry to its' CDT coding in 2018. The two full codes in CDT are:

"D9995 Teledentistry-synchronous; real-time encounter

- Reported in addition to other procedures (e.g., diagnostic) delivered to the patient on the date of service

D9996 Teledentistry-asynchronous; information stored and forwarded to dentist for subsequent review

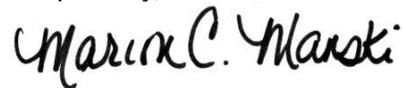
- Reported in addition to other procedures (e.g., diagnostic) delivered to the patient on the date of service”¹

Thus, using these codes, in addition to coding for the implementation of care, provides the dental hygienist the ability to properly document treatment services and proceed with care in discussion with the dentist. Providing care to patients via telehealth is the future and necessary. Patients in rural, underserved communities, schools, nursing homes, prisons, and Indian reservations can benefit from telehealth. Many homebound patients may also benefit to necessary care that otherwise would be impossible to obtain.³ The creation of an interface between health care providers and the patient is innovative, timely and much needed. Dentists, dental hygienists and even dental therapists can triage patients via teledentistry and provide collaboration amongst professionals, facilitate real time interaction between the provider and patient and allows for diagnostic examinations.⁴

Patients are very interested in this method of care. Seventy eight percent of patients in a 2019 survey state they would use teledentistry and felt confident that it would promote healthy behaviors, reducing oral disease.⁵ Reduced fees, less wait times, improved access to care, in my opinion leads to less cost in healthcare and healthier citizens of Connecticut. Please support SB 1022 with suggested amendment to include dental hygienists; an essential preventive provider in dentistry. I also ask for you to support HB 5596 as written.

I respectfully request a favorable committee report regarding SB 1022 and HB 5596. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,



Marion C. Manski, MS, RDH

Chair, Legislative Committee
Board Trustee Southeastern CT
American Dental Hygienists' Association-Connecticut

References:

1. American Dental Association Policy on Teledentistry. <https://www.ada.org/en/about-the-ada/ada-positions-policies-and-statements/statement-on-teledentistry> Accessed March 12, 2021.
2. American Dental Hygienists' Association. Direct Access. <https://www.adha.org/direct-access> Accessed March 12, 2021.
3. Matthews NS. The Impact of Teledentistry on Practice and Dental Education. American Dental Education Association Winter Business Meeting, January 2021.
4. Moore TA. The Increasing Utilization of Teledentistry. Dimensions of Dental Hygiene, (2020). <https://dimensionsofdentalhygiene.com/article/increasing-utilization-teledentistry/> Accessed March 12, 2021.
5. Teledentistry: Survey Shows Patients are Ready to Welcome It. <https://dentavox.dentacoin.com/blog/teledentistry-surteledentistry-survey-shows-patients-are-ready-to-welcome-it/> Accessed March 12, 2021.