



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Finance Committee

February 18, 2020

Senate Bill 511: Task Force on Oral Health in Maryland

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, Senators Beidle, Benson, Hayes, Klausmeier, Kramer, Pinsky, Reilly, West and Young, and members of the Finance Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 511: Task Force on Oral Health in Maryland.

This legislation would establish the Task Force on Oral Health in Maryland; providing for the composition, chair, and staffing of the Task Force; prohibiting a member of the Task Force from receiving certain compensation, but authorizing the reimbursement of certain expenses; requiring the Task Force to study and make recommendations regarding certain matters; requiring the Task Force to submit interim and final reports to the Governor and certain committees of the General Assembly on or before certain dates; providing for the termination of this Act; and generally relating to the Task Force on Oral Health in Maryland

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

The 2018 Maryland Rural Health Plan (www.MDRuralHealthPlan.org), an extensive assessment of Maryland's rural health needs, identified the need for increased access to dental care, as a recurring theme. Specifically, there are several barriers to oral health in rural communities: poverty and the ability to pay; lack of insurance or type of insurance; transportation limitations; lack of understanding the importance of dental health; lack of dental services; and lack of dentist accepting patients on state insurance. The combination of these barriers has resulted in poor dental health outcomes for Maryland's rural communities. The rural jurisdictions of Allegany, Caroline, Charles, Dorchester, Garrett, Queen Anne's, Somerset, Talbot, Washington, Wicomico, and Worcester all contain a Dental Health Professional Shortage Area.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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