



The Honorable Anne Kaiser
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 130
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

January 28, 2020

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 15 – PUBLIC SCHOOLS – STUDENT HEALTH –
CERTIFICATE OF DENTAL HEALTH**

Dear Chair Kaiser:

The Maryland Dental Hygienists Association (MDHA) is an organization seeking to improve the public's total health by advancing the art and science of dental hygiene, including ensuring access to quality oral health care, increasing awareness of the cost-effective benefits of preventative dental services, promoting the highest standards of dental hygiene education, licensure, practice and research, and representing and promoting the interests of dental hygienists in Maryland. In keeping with that mission, MDHA takes this opportunity to voice its support for House Bill 15, which requires students enrolled in a public elementary or secondary school in Maryland to submit a certificate of dental health.

Requiring students to submit certificates of dental health, similar to requirements placed on other essential healthcare services, helps to emphasize the importance of oral health and the benefits of preventative dental services. Oral health is essential to overall health, and policies that encourage families to prioritize regular dental care and establish strong oral health habits at a young age are critical to improving general health and achieving all the benefits that go along with that, including improved academic performance and well-being.

While Maryland has made significant strides in improving the oral health status of its children, disparities still exist, regionally, by socioeconomic status and by grade level. According to data gathered by the Maryland Department of Health, Maryland children still suffer from high levels of dental caries, untreated decay, and the need for dental sealants and cleaning. These needs increase significantly as children move from kindergarten to third grade, so policies that incentivize families to address these needs early, when children enter the public school system, are essential.

MDHA takes this opportunity to thank Delegate Andrea Harrison for her leadership on this important issue, and will continue to work with her and the members of the House Ways and Means Matters Committee to develop and implement effective dental health policy for students in Maryland. MDHA urges the Committee's favorable consideration of House Bill 15.