



To: The Honorable Chair, Delegate Shane Pendergrass, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee  
From: Melissa S. Rock, Interim Managing Director & Director, Birth to Three Strategic Initiative  
Re: **HB 368: Task Force on Oral Health in Maryland**  
Date: January 19, 2021  
Position: **SUPPORT**

Oral health is a critical component of overall health. While Maryland has made much progress in the last decade to improve the oral health status of its residents, access problems remain for poor and vulnerable populations. Not surprisingly, the lack of access to dental care disproportionately impacts low-income women and children who rely on Medicaid to pay for their oral health care. For children, poor dental health can lead to lifelong medical problems and inhibit their ability to learn or attend school.

HB 368 would establish a task force that would bring together representatives from all the relevant state agencies, as well as a diverse group of expert stakeholders and advocates. It, therefore, offers an opportunity to reach a consensus on a multi-faceted set of proposals and strategies that would have the potential to expand the capacity of the oral health care delivery system for underserved low-income and vulnerable populations.

In the winter of 2019 ACY, with support of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Department of Health Policy and Management, released a report, "**Access to Dental Care in Maryland: An Assessment of Challenges and Solutions.**" This report would be a considerable benefit to the task force. It both identifies the challenges and the extent to which low-income Maryland residents face barriers in access to dental care, and also includes a literature review to explore policies and programs implemented by other states to expand the capacity of the oral health care delivery system and weigh the risks and benefits of adopting similar policy levers in Maryland. The report can be found at [bit.ly/2P0VxO3](https://bit.ly/2P0VxO3).

The report concludes that there is no silver bullet to fix access to dental care across Maryland. Instead, there needs to be a multi-faceted approach to address the disparities and remove barriers to oral health services for low-income Marylanders. This multi-faceted approach could include a review of the Medicaid reimbursement rates to dentists, loan support, dental residency and externship programs, public education programs to improve oral health literacy and expanding the use and scope of dental therapists.

**ACY supports continued efforts to reduce barriers to access dental care in Maryland and would be honored to serve on the task force analyzing this important issue.**