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Testimony in Support of
Senate Bill 150 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults
Senate Finance Committee
January 25, 2022

The Rural Maryland Council **supports** Senate Bill 150 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults. This will require the Maryland Medical Assistance Program, beginning January 1, 2023, and subject to certain limitations, to provide certain dental care for adults whose annual income is at or below 133 percent of the federal poverty level.

Providing dental care is crucial to an individual’s overall health, and it is important that preventative measures are taken to assure that long-term complications do not occur. When someone does not have the financial capabilities to attend dentist appointments for routine cleaning and checkups, it leads to a decrease in dental health and higher risk of developing more serious complications such as cavities or abscess teeth. The individual is then forced to pay for expensive treatment or suffer through the pain because they are unable to afford treatment. According to Data USA, in 2018 St. Mary’s had a population of 111,531 citizens, of which 8.3% had incomes at or below the federal poverty level, 5.8% had no health or dental insurance, and 11.8% were covered by Medicaid.

Rural Marylanders tend to be older, in worse health and have lower incomes compared to their suburban counterparts. These factors can negatively affect oral health. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) lists disparities in oral health, including income. According to the CDC’s *Disparities in Oral Health* webpage, 17% of children aged 2 to 5 from low-income households have untreated cavities in their primary teeth, which is three times the percentage of children from higher-income households; and that 23% of children aged 2 to 19 from low-income households have untreated cavities in their permanent teeth, which is twice that of children from higher-income households. It also states that adults between 20 to 64 that are low-income or uninsured are twice as likely to have one to three untreated cavities and three times as likely to have four or more untreated cavities compared to those of higher incomes or have private insurance. Because of the current historic State surplus, now would be an appropriate time to add additional funding that would change the overall dental health and lives of those that cannot currently afford to do so.

Income should not determine an individual’s access to dental care - the Rural Maryland Council respectfully requests your favorable report of Senate Bill 150

The Rural Maryland Council (RMC) is an independent state agency governed by a nonpartisan, 40-member board that consists of inclusive representation from the federal, state, regional, county and municipal governments, as well as the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. We bring together federal, state, county and municipal government officials as well as representatives of the for-profit and nonprofit sectors to identify challenges unique to rural communities and to craft public policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions.