



January 25, 2022

The Honorable Delores Kelley  
Chair, Senate Finance Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building, 3 East  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 150 – MARYLAND MEDICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM – DENTAL COVERAGE FOR ADULTS

Benevis is a dental support organization providing non-clinical support services to dental practices across Maryland. Benevis is dedicated to its mission to improve access to dentistry by providing the highest quality non-clinical services to some of the nation's leading dental practices. In Maryland, the nine dental practices Benevis supports specialize in providing Medicaid dental services, with those practices serving a patient population that is more than 80% Medicaid. Together, these practices make up one of the largest providers of Medicaid dental services in the state, providing just under 20% of the Medicaid dental services statewide and approximately 40% of the Medicaid dental services in the Baltimore region. As a major Medicaid dental provider in the State, we strongly support the establishment and implementation of an adult dental benefit in Maryland's Medical Assistance Program and urge the State to continue its investment in Maryland's dental provider safety net.

As part of the implementation process for a permanent adult benefit, we urge the General Assembly and the Administration to include a significant increase in the reimbursement rates for Medicaid dental services. Across the nation, Medicaid dental rates have persistently lagged behind commercial dental insurance rates and rates for Medicaid medical services, including Maryland which has not seen a comprehensive increase in Medicaid dental rates for more than a decade. This stagnation in reimbursement rates has significantly limited the ability of Medicaid-focused providers to maintain reasonable wages for dental practitioners, particularly for dental hygienists and dental assistants. This Committee is very familiar with the struggle to maintain and compensate quality healthcare practitioners when reimbursement rates simply do not support it.

This limitation on wages combined with our ability to maintain staff during COVID, in professions with a higher risk for infection and that utilize a workforce that has been particularly hard hit by the shutdown of childcare and other resources, means the practices we support are already operating with minimal staff. Additionally, our practices, which traditionally have focused on pediatric care, have struggled to keep up with increased demand for services due to gaps created by the shutdown of community-based care due to the pandemic. Children who used

to receive services through schools, Headstart programs, and other entities, have not had access to that care, resulting in increased demand on pediatric and Medicaid-focused practices. Patients who were once able to access care within days, or even same-day, now must wait weeks for appointments because there simply is not enough practitioners to treat them.

While Medicaid dental rates have remained stagnant, the cost of providing dental care has increased, particularly during COVID when providers must utilize high cost personal protective equipment (PPE) that cannot be billed to Medicaid, in contrast to PPE for services covered by private insurance or out-of-pocket payment, where that additional cost is passed on to the payer. This combination of increased cost and a lack of requisite increase in reimbursement rates has only intensified the need for higher rates.

As a major Medicaid dental provider, we enthusiastically welcome the implementation of an adult dental benefit here in Maryland, as we have always strived to serve our patients and their entire families. However, under the current rate structure, we are already struggling to keep up with service demand and have serious concerns about our ability to take on an expanded population without a requisite investment in the infrastructure of Maryland's dental safety net.

We look forward to working with the bill sponsors, the Committee, Maryland Medicaid and all of the stakeholders advocating for this legislation to best implement this long-awaited program. Thank you to the Committee for its consideration and its longstanding work on dental access for all Marylanders, and Benevis urges the favorable consideration of Senate Bill 150, including support for increased investment in Maryland's Medicaid dental network.