



Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy *Vision:* Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

SB150 Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults

Hearing Date: 1/25/22

Committee: Finance

Position: SUPPORT

Madam Chair and Members of the Senate Finance Committee, we thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 150, which would provide dental coverage to adults at or below 133% of the federal poverty level. Thank you especially to the bill’s sponsors, Senator Augustine and Senator Guzzone.

Our member shares: “As a young adult with student debt, I had the opportunity to have free dental coverage through Maryland Medicaid. Not many were as privileged as me to be able to get access to dental coverage. I felt less anxious because I knew my oral health was being taken care of.”

Currently 800,000 low-income adults in Maryland do not have a reliable source of dental coverage for basic preventative and restorative services. This is a major public health problem. Untreated oral health problems can lead to malnutrition, cancers, heart and lung disease, poor birth outcomes, diabetes, and stroke.¹ Untreated oral health problems also harm mental health. About forty-two percent of low-income adults have difficulty biting and chewing, and twenty-three percent of low-income adults reduce participation in social activities due to the condition of their mouth and teeth. One in every five adults experiences anxiety due to the state of their mouth and teeth.²

In addition, this is a matter of public health equity. About twice as many non-Hispanic Black or Mexican American adults have untreated cavities as non-Hispanic White adults. Also, more than nine in ten older adults have had cavities, and one in six have untreated cavities. Older non-Hispanic Black or Mexican American adults have two to three times the rate of untreated cavities as older non-Hispanic White adults.ⁱ

Thank you again to the Committee for your leadership on public health in Maryland. This bill is essential for Maryland to continue to lead in the nation. We urge a favorable report from the Committee on Senate Bill 150.

¹ Hinton, E. & Paradise, J. (2016, March 17). Access to Dental Care in Medicaid: Spotlight on Nonelderly Adults. KFF. <https://www.kff.org/report-section/access-to-dental-care-in-medicaid-spotlight-on-nonelderly-adults-issue-brief>

² Oral Health and Well-Being in the United States. <https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/us-oral-health-well-being.pdf>

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [Oral Health Surveillance Report: Trends in Dental Caries and Sealants, Tooth Retention, and Edentulism, United States, 1999–2004 to 2011–2016](#). US Dept of Health and Human Services; 2019.