

Avēsis, LLC Statement
in Support of
SB 150,
Maryland Medical Assistance Program-Dental Coverage for Adults
January 25, 2022

Chair Kelly and Committee members, my name is Michael Exler, DDS, FAGD. I am the Chief Dental Officer at Avēsis, LLC, an administrator of dental and vision benefits for Medicaid members across the country, as well as a former practicing dentist in both Baltimore County and Baltimore City for over 40 years. I was a provider in the Healthy Smiles program and know first-hand the value that having dental benefits provides to Medicaid members.

I am proud that in my work at Avesis, which started in Owings Mills and is now a national company, we have partnered with managed care plans, states, and other stakeholders across the country to help expand access to dental care for both children and adults. As a Maryland native, it has been a sore spot for me that our state is behind nearly every other state in not providing dental benefits for its adult Medicaid members.

Maryland is broadly recognized for its world-class medical research and treatment facilities. That we have not been a leader in dental treatment for our most vulnerable citizens, but have lagged behind nearly every other state should end now. While not having a comprehensive adult dental program may provide the state some near-term savings, putting a program in place will provide enormous benefit for the state, the health care system, and Medicaid members.

Without a dental benefit:

- Medicaid members put off minor dental problems until painful complications develop and show up at emergency departments, which are usually unable to provide any help beyond pain relief medication.
- Medicaid members in need of dental care show up at free dental clinics, which may be few and far between, where many are turned away due to the

overwhelming demand. Further, COVID has caused most large mobile free dental clinics to temporarily shut down.

- Adults without dental coverage may be ashamed to seek employment, or be turned down for a job, due to their poor oral health.

For a long time, even our Medicaid program for children had the reputation of being one of the worst in the country. Unfortunately, it took the death of twelve-year-old Deamonte Driver, a Prince George's County resident, in 2007 for the state to make dramatic changes to the children's dental program. It is past time for adoption of a comprehensive dental benefit for adults. Let's not wait until there is another tragedy. I request your support of SB 150.

If you have any questions, contact Tom Tremble, Avēsis Assistant Vice President of Government Affairs at 202-299-6166 or Marta Harting, with Venable, at 410-244-7542.



