



The Honorable Shane Pendergrass
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

March 4, 2022

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS - HOUSE BILL 968 - HEALTH OCCUPATIONS – DENTAL ASSISTANTS – CERTIFICATION AND REGULATION

Dear Chair Pendergrass and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Dental Hygienists Association (MDHA) is an organization seeking to improve the public's total health by advancing the art and science of dental hygiene, including ensuring access to quality oral health care, increasing awareness of the cost-effective benefits of preventative dental services, promoting the highest standards of dental hygiene education, licensure, practice and research, and representing and promoting the interests of dental hygienists in Maryland. In keeping with that mission, MDHA takes this opportunity to voice its support with amendments for House Bill 968 which would create a new credential for qualifying dental assistants in Maryland and expand the intraoral procedures able to be performed by those dental assistants.

MDHA is generally supportive of legislation that would safely allow qualifying dental assistants to perform additional intraoral procedures, however we believe it is essential that certain additional provisions be included in the legislation to ensure patient safety and clarity and consistency in the law. Below, please find a general description of MDHA's concerns and suggested amendments to HB968:

Clarification of Credential:

As introduced, HB968 creates in statute the credential of a Certified Dental Assistant. Outside of statute, the term "Certified Dental Assistant" is commonly used to describe dental assistants who complete certain training to perform enhanced functions, but those may differ from the additional procedures specified in HB968. MDHA would seek a clarification in the term/title used to refer to the enhanced function dental assistants in the legislation, so as to avoid confusion with commonly used, non-statutory terms. Additionally, as the dental assistants seeking recognition and qualification under the proposed legislation should be licensed under the Board of Dental Examiners as the services they seek to perform are currently only performed by licensed practitioners and this would ensure standardization across all dental practitioners for this particular scope of services.

Education in an Accredited Program

Under current law, dentists and dental hygienists must complete all required education and training through an accredited educational program, including training required to perform services identical to those specified for Certified Dental Assistants in HB968. To ensure that these services are performed in a standardized and safe manner, we request that a similar requirement be in place for dental assistants seeking to perform these specific tasks. Therefore, a dental assistant seeking certification and expanded function under the legislation should complete the requisite education in an accredited program. Given the limited accredited dental assistant programs that currently exist in the State, MDHA is committed to working with the State and stakeholders to increase accredited educational opportunities for dental assistants seeking to expand their function under HB968. Additionally, MDHA urges the Committee to consider increasing the age requirement for Certified

Dental Assistants from 17 years to 18 years, consistent with the age requirement for intraoral radiograph procedure privileges.

Removal of Coronal Polishing from Scope

MDHA has concerns with the inclusion of coronal polishing, under any circumstances, in the scope for Certified Dental Assistants under HB968. First, coronal polishing, if done incorrectly, can strip the protective covering of a tooth and lead to increased risk of damage and decay. Second, coronal polishing for stain removal may be perceived by a patient as a dental prophylaxis or “cleaning” and may result in that patient failing to seek full preventative care. To only polish the teeth without proper scaling would be substandard care and that patient would fail to receive the full preventative benefits.

Finally, MDHA recognizes the interest in increasing the scope of practice for dental assistants to help address concerns relating to staffing and gaps in dental services in the State. If there are certain populations or areas where the need for service demands increased reliance on dental assistants, rather than other dental practitioners, we would urge the Committee to consider limiting this expanded scope to those specific gaps.

MDHA thanks Delegate Kipke and the members of the Committee for their leadership on dental health matters and looks forward to working with all stakeholders to amend the proposed legislation to allow for the expansion of scope for dental assistants and adequately address staffing shortages and gaps in dental care in Maryland, while maintaining standardized safeguards for patients and practitioners. Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and position on House Bill 968.