



EASTERN SHORE AREA HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER

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Chair Shane E. Pendergrass  
Room 241  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Honorable Chair Pendergrass:

The Eastern Shore Area Health Education Center and myself as a Registered Dental Hygienist strongly supports HB6 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults.

The mouth is the gateway to the rest of the body. Research has proven without a doubt that oral health is directly related to overall health. This means that when there is inflammation and/or infection found in the mouth, that infection is traveling throughout the rest of the body, creating inflammation in our arteries, joints, organs, and tissues. Chronic infection and inflammation is incredibly taxing on one's immune system, making it increasingly difficult to treat other conditions such as hypertension, diabetes and pain management just to name a few. Preventative dentistry is ideal however the reality is that individuals without dental coverage are not as likely to seek routine preventative dental treatment. Years of dental neglect leads to a broken down dentition, poor nutrition, chronic pain, infection, lower self-esteem and is a barrier to employment. Maryland is behind the rest of the United States being 1 of only 3 states in our nation without adult dental coverage. Lack of dental coverage ends up being costlier on the state's healthcare system and unnecessarily crowds emergency departments. In a study on dental coverage for New York's Medicaid program, preventative dental care lowered overall health care costs by \$530.50 per participant annually (source: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/00220345211007448>) and Cigna, a health insurance company provides information that demonstrates how dental coverage significantly lowers health care costs. For example individuals with gum disease, dental coverage lowered overall costs for people with chronic conditions, including: \$1,687 for diabetes and \$2,101 for heart disease (source: <https://www.cigna.com/assets/docs/business/large-employers/dental-white-paper.pdf>). These are just two examples of how adult dental coverage is a fiscally responsible choice and helps to alleviate the stress that oral disease places on our medical system which now more than ever is critically important amidst the COVID pandemic and healthcare shortage crisis.

Lastly, in 2007 Marylanders became aware of just how serious dental infections are when we lost 12 year old Deamonte Driver from a dental infection that spread to his brain. Maryland has made great progress in bridging the oral health disparities that existed for our youth. However, we must not forget about the adults. After all they are the ones responsible for caring for the oral health of their children. If the adult/parent/guardian does not understand the benefit good oral health plays in their own health they are less likely to implement healthy oral health and nutrition habits with their children. It's an unfortunate cycle that will continue to repeat unless we start making the oral health of our adult population a priority.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony, and we urge a favorable vote. If we can provide any further information please contact Caitlin Donohue-Vega, RDH, BS at [cvega@esahec.org](mailto:cvega@esahec.org)

Sincerely,

*Caitlin Donohue-Vega, RDH, BS*

Caitlin Donohue-Vega, RDH, BS  
**Oral Health Outreach Coordinator**  
Eastern Shore Area Health Education Center