



Written Testimony in Support of HB 1146

Madam Chair, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written support in favor of HB 1146. My name is Alexandra Fitzgerald and I am a general dentist practicing in Frederick, Maryland. Along with providing care in a private practice setting, I additionally serve as the President-Elect of the Maryland State Dental Association (MSDA). I have participated in numerous Mission of Mercy events across the state and seen first-hand the numerous barriers to care for many, leading to poor overall health, pain, and diminished self-esteem.

In 2018, Governor Hogan signed into law a pilot program of the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide dental coverage for adults. The Department of Health's objective at that time was to determine whether offering an adult dental benefit would improve health outcomes for vulnerable adults. Thankfully, the findings were favorable and as of January of 2023, the Maryland Medical Assistance Program does provide coverage for certain dental procedures.

For the state's programs to be successful, a sustainable network of dental providers must be available, backed by a straightforward registration process, limited administrative burdens, and an appropriate fee schedule. Many dentists have made the decision to not participate in the state's Medicaid program as a result of these challenges. Often times, participation in the program is subsidized by the office itself as a result of low coverage. Many dentists in the beginning stages of their careers cannot afford to participate because they are in a different financial situation with higher amounts of student loan debt upon graduation than generations past.

The fee schedule for Maryland Healthy Smiles has been relatively stagnant for the past 13 years with limited increases for only specific codes, while the cost of treatment, supplies, and staff has increased. Furthermore, some of the treatment necessary to provide appropriate care of patients has no coverage. To provide an example, under the current plan for adults, extractions are covered, but removable dentures are not. This means a patient will be missing teeth and potentially unable to eat. HB 1146 has the opportunity for the Department of Health to conduct reviews to ensure appropriate oral health care is provided at an adequate reimbursement rate.

I thank you for the opportunity to consider my testimony and respectfully request a favorable report for HB 1146.

Thank you,

Alexandra Fitzgerald, DDS
MSDA President-Elect