



The Maryland State Dental Association Opposes HB 393 – Higher Education – Maryland Dent-Care Program-Eligibility

Submitted by Daniel T. Doherty, Jr. on Behalf of the Maryland State Dental Association

The Maryland Dent-Care Program was established and has operated with a 2-fold purpose. First, to provide financial assistance to dentists who are practicing following dental school and who are saddled with tremendous debt from student loans; and second, to link this financial assistance to a 3-year obligation whereby the dentist agrees that at least 30% of the patients treated in a private practice or clinical setting will be Maryland Medical Assistance Program recipients. The intent of the Program is to encourage more dentists and dental hygienists to select Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) to establish their practice, and staying in the area to provide dental care to the Dental Medicaid population. Traditionally, the grant recipients have been graduates of the University of Maryland School of Dentistry, and graduates of other dental schools who are, or intend to become, Maryland based dental providers. The program requires that the recipients continue to be employed for the 3 years as **full-timed dentists**.

In 2023 the General Assembly passed HB 290 which among other provisions increased the amount of the grants to a dentist to \$50,000 per year for up to 3 years. It also expanded the program to include dental hygienists authorizing grants of not more than \$10,000 for 2 years. The intent was to provide grants in fiscal year 2025 for 8 dentists and 5 dental hygienists at a budget cost of \$450,000. That money has not been appropriated in the 2024-2025 Budget, and the Department has been able to fund only 2.5 positions.

HB 393 proposes to add part-time dentists as eligible recipients of Maryland Dent-Care Grants. The MSDA strongly opposes these changes because part-time dentists are far less likely to stay in the HPSA in which they have been practicing for 3 years, undermining the goal of these recipients making the HPSA their “home” and continuing to serve the Dental Medicaid population. Including part-time dentists will further dilute the meager budgetary appropriation for this program, and reduce the probability of dentists committing their practices to this population.

HB 393 would also include limited licensees as eligible recipients of these grants. This permits the awarding of grants to internationally trained dentists whose practices are restricted because they are unable to qualify for a general dental license. These individuals generally do not have the same level of training as the applicants who have a general license to practice dentistry. There are pathways for internationally trained dentists to become eligible for a general license. The program should not include foreign trained dentists whose dental school training was not in the United States or Canada, who, if they have student loans, the loans are not obligations owed to American financial lenders or institutions. To include them, the MSDA contends, would be an ill-advised public policy.

For these reasons the Maryland State Dental Association urges that HB 393 receive an unfavorable report.

**Submitted February 14, 2024 by:
Daniel T. Doherty, Jr.**