



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the House Health and Government Operations Committee

Chair: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk

January 23, 2024

House Bill 0023: Maryland Health Benefit Exchange – Qualified Health Plans – Dental Coverage

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 0023: Maryland Health Benefit Exchange – Qualified Health Plans – Dental Coverage.

Oral health is a largely known health indicator that can lead to the development of diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke (Healthy People 2030, n.d.). Furthermore, adequate dental care is essential in health preservation, especially for children. According to a 2021 Data Brief published by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), pediatric dental coverage and utilization in the United States has seen a steady decline between 2019-2020. The southern region of the United States saw a 3.4% decrease in pediatric dental utilization, although the disparity was substantially higher for residents living below the federal poverty level. Although the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the decline, it began prior to the pandemic. (Adjaye-Gbewonyo & Black, 2021). With 9.6% of Maryland residents living below the federal poverty line, most of which reside in our rural communities, rural residents will be deeply impacted by the result of this bill (American Community Survey, 2022). This bill will provide families with an additional option to affordable dental coverage for themselves and their children. Dental cavities/tooth decay is the leading chronic illness found in children today and is 100% preventable. Poor oral health can negatively impact child growth and development resulting in lasting consequences that may follow the child into adulthood. MRHA believes that House Bill 0023 will have a significantly positive impact on the oral health of its residents.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Dayton, MS, NREMT, CNE, Executive Director

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Adjaye-Gbewonyo, D., & Black, L. I. (2021). Dental care utilization among children aged 1–17 years: United States, 2019 and 2020. *National Center for Health Statistics*. <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:111175>

American Community Survey. (2022). *Poverty status in the past 12 months: Maryland 2022, table S1701*. [Data set]. U.S. Census Bureau. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S1701?q=poverty%20line%20maryland&t=Poverty>

Healthy People 2030. (n.d.) Leading health indicators. <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/leading-health-indicators>