



Committee: House Health and Government Operations Committee

Bill Number: HB 393 – Higher Education – Maryland Dent-Care Program - Eligibility

Hearing Date: February 14, 2024

Position: Support

The Maryland Affiliate of the American College of Nurse Midwives (ACNM) supports *House Bill 393 – Higher Education – Maryland Dent-Care Program – Eligibility*. The bill would make part-time dental hygienists and dentists eligible for the loan repayment program, called Dent-Care Program. The program supports dental providers who serve Medicaid participants.

ACNM has been a partner in expanding access to dental services for pregnant and postpartum individuals:

- In 2021, ACNM supported a budget initiative that expanded dental coverage for pregnant individuals through the postpartum period;
- In 2022, ACNM supported the establishment of dental coverage for all adult Medicaid participants through HB 6/SB 150 (Delegates Cullison and McKay/Senator Augustine and Guzzone); and
- In 2022, ACNM supported legislation to recognize that dental hygienists could provide preventive services in the practices of nurse-midwives and nurse practitioners through HB 219/SB 306 (then Delegate Kelly/Senator Lam).

Dental care is an essential but sometimes under-emphasized part of pregnancy care. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), 40% of women experience some form of periodontal disease during pregnancy. The risk is even higher in the Black community.¹

Loan repayment programs, like the Dent-Care Program, are an important strategy in building a diverse provider base that reflects the communities that they serve. To be successful, these programs need to be inclusive of a broad range of practitioners. House Bill 393 recognizes the economic and family realities faced by many practitioners who need to work part-time because of child care or other family obligations.

As nurse-midwives, we are particularly attuned to the challenges faced by women in navigating work and family obligations. We would note that 95% of dental hygiene students and 56% of dental students are women.^{ii,iii} According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 15% of women vs 3% of men work part-time in the age range of 35 to 44 years old.^{iv} This legislation supports more women being eligible for the Dent-Care Program.

We ask for a favorable report. If we can provide any additional information, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.

ⁱ <https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2013/08/oral-health-care-during-pregnancy-and-through-the-lifespan>

ⁱⁱ https://www.adea.org/GoDental/Future_Dental_Hygienists/Dental_hygiene_by_the_numbers.aspx

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://adanews.ada.org/ada-news/2022/june/among-first-year-dental-students-women-see-highest-rate-of-enrollment/>

^{iv} <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2018/article/who-chooses-part-time-work-and-why.htm>