

BALTIMORE
8 Market Place, 5th Fl
Baltimore, MD 21202
V 410.547.9200
F 410.547.8690



SILVER SPRING
8720 Georgia Ave., Suite 303
Silver Spring, MD 20910
V 301.585.5333
F 301.585.5366

Voices for Maryland's Children | www.acy.org

**House Ways and Means Committee – March 20 2012
Testimony in Support of HB 1401**

As a state-wide child advocacy organization dedicated to improving the lives of Maryland's children, Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) fully supports HB 1401. The bill requires County school superintendents to certify that oral health education, including oral disease prevention and dental health promotion, is being taught in County schools.

As an original member of the Dental Actin Committee that was brought together after Deamonte Driver's tragic death in 2007, ACY has worked hard to ensure that low-income children in Maryland have access to needed dental services. Prevention is a key component for improving the oral health status of children. Regular exposure to oral health education is an inexpensive, yet important means for preventing tooth decay and avoiding dental disease.

Many people do not realize that tooth decay is the single most common chronic childhood disease, nor do they realize that over 50% of children between ages 5 and 9 have at least one cavity or filling. Oral health is often taken for granted, but it is in fact an essential component of overall health. Good oral health enhances our ability to speak, smile, smell, taste, touch, chew, swallow, and convey our feelings and emotions through facial expressions. However, oral diseases, which range from cavities to oral cancer, cause pain and disability for millions of Americans each year.

Maryland has made significant progress in reforming its oral health care system over the past five years. But there is more to be done and good oral health messaging and education through the schools is an effective way to build on this progress.

ACY urges your full support of this simple but important legislation.

Thank you.

Leigh Stevenson Cobb, Health Policy Director

