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JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

February 27, 2012

The Honorable Joan Carter Conway
Chairwoman, Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401-1991

Dear Chairwoman Conway,

I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 867, State Department of Education – Oral Health Education – Certification and Monitoring. This bill recognizes the importance of dental health literacy by requiring instruction in oral disease prevention in Maryland schools. This effort helps to underscore the relationship between dental care and overall health and wellness.

I believe that education is an important component of dental health promotion. I am a proud supporter of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and have advocated for full funding for oral health provisions included in the legislation, including school-based sealant programs and an oral health campaign. Senate Bill 867 complements these Federal efforts by incorporating dental care into the school curriculum.

Tooth decay is the most common chronic infectious disease among children. One in seven elementary-school-aged children suffers from a toothache, with wide-ranging effects on their attendance and performance at school. This bill will help to prevent oral disease by ensuring that students receive the information they need to enable them to properly attend to their dental health.

The State of Maryland has made tremendous progress in expanding access to dental care for children since the death five years ago of Deamonte Driver, a 12-year-old Prince George's County resident who died when his mother could not find a dentist willing to extract his infected tooth, but there are still too many families who wrongly accept tooth decay as routine and unavoidable. Oral health literacy is critical to dispelling these myths and enabling children and their families to prevent disease before it starts.

I strongly support Senate Bill 867 for its important message to children and families about the value of oral health, the power of prevention, and the importance of regular screenings. I appreciate your leadership on this issue and urge the members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee to report this measure favorably to the full Senate.

Sincerely,



Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress

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