

Fletcher & Fletcher Family Dentistry

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The Honorable Sheila E. Hixson
Chair, Ways and Means Committee
District 20, Montgomery County
House Office Building
6 Bladen St., Room 131
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Delegate Hixson,

I would like to thank you, the Chairman, and the Committee for the opportunity to present this written testimony on House Bill 1401.

Each of you is certainly aware that dental caries or cavities are the most preventable disease in the world. The results of untreated caries can lead to a litany of maladies that affect the daily activities of millions of Americans and tens of thousands of Maryland citizens. I'm sure that you are aware of the disproportionate numbers of children who unfortunately have to deal with oral problems and toothaches every day which can affect their ability to eat, sleep, study, and live normal everyday lives.

The old adage of "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is apropos to the legislation in House Bill 1401. We are asking that this legislation ensure that oral health education is the fundamental preventive measure for our children. The impact of oral health and its relationship to overall health is well documented with research ongoing to further illustrate the need to educate for prevention to work at its best. We must begin the prevention education program at as early an age as possible to establish good health habits that will last for a lifetime.

The dental team educates our patients daily and we recognize the challenges of our educators to cover all of the material required in the curriculum. However, the opportunity by the dental team to reach the students of the state is limited by the meager number of visits relative to those who do not have coverage and even those who do. The innovative natures of the educators of the state are certainly sufficient to meet this challenge. We are sure that they are more than willing to assist their students to be as productive as possible and maintaining good oral health is important to eliminating toothaches as one of the distractions to the education process. We hope you would agree.

The State of Maryland has the opportunity to once again be at the forefront of leading the nation with this legislation. Organized Dentistry will use this example to escalate the efforts to promote

good oral health throughout the United States. We are sure that the wisdom of this body will not miss this opportunity to set the trend of the nation on oral health education using the innovative curriculum and resources available. Much of the resources have been supported by the various components of the dental profession in a unified fashion. The final component is the support of the legislative bodies of Maryland and those across the country to not only recognize the importance of educating our youth on the fundamentals of oral health education but also the impact it will have on the overall health of generations to come.

We have to assert that we are not in favor of amendments that would water down the effectiveness of this critical prevention program. Suggesting a five year reporting period is counterproductive to ensuring that our children are in fact getting the oral health education to make their lives better. The likelihood that there is no education being provided is the most likely scenario until the reporting period arises. That leads to essentially two encounters per student's lifetime from k through 12. That may be one more encounter than the status quo. This is absolutely unacceptable.

Again, thank you for this opportunity and we would ask that you report House Bill 1401 as favorable with no amendments.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nathan Fletcher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Nathan Fletcher
Past President
National Dental Association
Maryland Dental Society