



March 20, 2012

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

Re: Support Testimony for House Bill 1401
Oral Health Education – Certification and Monitoring

Good Afternoon Delegate Hixson:

Thank you for sponsoring HB1401, “Oral Health Education - Certification and Monitoring. I would as well like to thank Chairwoman Hattie Harrison, distinguished Committee Members and the Prince George’s Delegates Carolyn Howard, Jolene Ivey, Justin Ross, Michael Summers and Jay Walker for the opportunity to provide written in support of House Bill 1401 - Oral Health Education - Certification and Monitoring. I will share my perspective working on oral health issues in Prince George's County. I am pleased to share with you the possibilities this law will create.

I am the Program Chief of the Prince George's County Health Department Dental Health Program. I participate in a number of regional and State oral health initiatives, I am a board member of the Robert T. Freeman Dental Society Foundation and the Maryland Dental Action Coalition.

In my capacity as the Program Chief, our clinic provides direct dental services to more than 5,000 adults and children annually. In addition we conduct education outreach across the county in schools and in the community. Our work in schools continues to grow as we build relationships and collaborations on oral health issues across governmental boundaries. I am sure you have also heard of the successful Deamonte Driver Dental Project which provided mobile dental services to more than 2,000 children last year. Projects like the Deamonte Driver Dental Project will be enhanced by this bill as counties look for innovative ways to reach and educate students about oral health.

Children, especially lower income children, are at risk for poor oral health: without good oral health they are not indeed healthy as the Surgeon General's report on Oral Health amplified. The roughly 40% of U.S. children living in low-income households have about three to five times the level of untreated dental disease compared to their more affluent peers. Sadly, dental decay is the most common chronic childhood disease in the United States, yet it is most easily prevented. Children with continual dental pain fail to function properly in school and their everyday lives, impacting their development for years to come.

Children's teeth are meant to last a lifetime and a healthy smile is important to a child's self-esteem. With proper care, a balanced diet and regular dental visits, their teeth can remain healthy and strong. Yet approximately 16 million children have tooth decay much of which is preventable. Eighty percent of that tooth decay is suffered by 25% of the children. As noted in the Preamble of the Bill, tooth decay deeply impacts children. Indeed, tooth decay led nationally to 51 million school hours lost each year.

The American Dental Association declared February National Children's Dental Health Month to raise awareness about oral health. This year's slogan is 'Rock the Smile' a fun and exciting way to promote this important cause. The effort creates important attention on this matter but Senators your bill creates the focus and direction to insure that all Marylanders learn what they need to know about oral health.

This bill is particularly timely for me. In Prince George's County we have been working collaboratively with schools in a number of ways. During this month, we conduct poster contests in schools promoting and educating the students about the importance of good oral health. We have worked cooperatively to ensure that our presence does not interfere with the planned curriculum. The school administrators and nurses are extremely receptive and appreciate the time spent in working with the children. The spirit of this law will also create focus discussion about the curriculum and coordination required to effectively educate our young people. This bill will also ensure that all children in the school system receive the very important messages regarding good oral as it relates to overall good health.

In closing, I ask that the committee provide a favorable report for House Bill 1401.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debony R. Hughes, DDS". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Dr. Debony R. Hughes
Program Chief, Dental Health Program
Prince George's County Health Department