

Maryland Dental Action Coalition

March 15, 2012

The Honorable Sheila E. Hixson
Chair
Ways and Means Committee
House Office Building, Room 131
6 Bladen Street, Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: **HB 1401** – State Department of Education – Oral Health Education – Certification and Monitoring

Dear Delegate Hixson,

Thank you for allowing the Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC) an opportunity to comment on HB 1401 regarding oral health education in the public schools.

As you know, the MDAC was first established as the Dental Action Committee (DAC) by Maryland Secretary of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) John M. Colmers in the wake of the death of 12-year-old Deamonte Driver. In April 2010, the DAC transitioned into an independent coalition with a broadened mission aiming to increase access to oral health care, prevent oral disease, improve the quality of dental services, and improve oral health behaviors for all Marylanders through health education and literacy. We are a diverse group of stakeholders representing public and private sector health and social service providers, students, resource providers, academia, corporations, health and family advocates, policymakers, and funders.

Tooth decay is one of the most chronic childhood diseases. It is also preventable! We believe it is imperative that oral health education be included in school curricula. Throughout Maryland, there is a population of both children and adults who lack knowledge about effective oral health practices or about the relationship between oral health and overall health. In this affluent state, there are children who believe that having mouth pain is normal. This pain can cause children to miss school and to experience difficulty concentrating, thereby missing opportunities to learn. Their self-esteem may also be affected as their ability to speak and their cosmetic appearance are compromised. Ideally, through the inclusion of oral health education in the schools, children can be taught about the need to visit a dentist to have their teeth examined and cleaned, and to receive fluoride treatments as necessary. An emphasis on the importance of proper brushing and flossing, and proper nutrition, can help reinforce positive oral health habits. Detrimental practices such as siblings going to bed with a bottle filled with milk, juice or soda, or using Sippy cups all day can be discouraged. These habits result in rampant tooth decay when the teeth are

Optimal Oral Health for All Marylanders

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constantly bathed in an acid media caused by these beverages. These are some of the highlights of what should be included in the curriculum.

As children learn these positive behaviors in a routine setting, they will take this information home and teach their parents or care givers about the importance of good oral health. More importantly, they will grow up knowing how to maintain a healthy mouth and prevent longer term and potentially costly problems. Proper oral care will result in good oral health, which will enhance good overall health.

In closing I ask that the committee provide a favorable report for HB 1401.

Thank you for your willingness to consider our concerns. Should you have questions, please feel free to contact me at (443) 858-8588 or at carolrdhhygiene@verizon.net.

Sincerely,



Carol Caiazzo
Chair, MDAC Board of Directors