

The Maryland Dental Society and Maryland State Dental Association Supports

Senate Bill 867 and HB 1401 entitled, "Oral Health Education - Certification and Monitoring"

BACKGROUND

SB 867 Sponsored by Senator Joan Carter Conway and **HB 1401** Sponsored by Delegate Sheila Hixson and Delegate Nathaniel Oaks- Introduced and read first time: February 3, 2012 - Assigned to: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs. For the purpose of (1) requiring county superintendents to make certain certifications regarding oral health education on or before a certain date each year; (2) requiring the State Department of Education to support and facilitate certain education and develop a process to monitor certain implementation of certain education; (3) requiring the Department to report certain information to the Governor and General Assembly on or before a certain date each year; and generally relating to oral health education in the State.

This is an exciting time for both the Maryland Department of Education and all of organized dentistry in our state. We want to do all that we can to help ensure oral health legislation that will make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and families living in poverty, often those who are disproportionately affected by dental disease. Many times this disproportion translates into children who sit in classrooms all throughout our state suffering with acute and chronic dental pain. Dental professionals in Maryland greatly appreciate that all children attending public schools will be able to get the *incorporated* educational support they need with the passage of Senate Bill 867.

Many people consider oral signs and symptoms to be less important than indications of general illness. As a result, they may avoid or postpone needed care, and care for their school aged children, thus exacerbating the problem. 108 million children and adults lack dental insurance, which is over 2.5 times the numbers who lack medical insurance which makes clear the importance of educating children and youth early about prevention. On February 25, 2008, our Maryland 12 year-old, Deamonte Driver died from preventable tooth decay. Ignoring oral health problems can lead to needless pain and suffering, causing devastating complications to an individual's well-being, with financial and social cost that significantly diminishes quality of life and burden American society.

If we are to improve the state of Maryland's capacity and as well that of the nation, to improve oral health and reduce health disparities, we need to enhance the public understands of the meaning of oral health and the relationship of the mouth to the rest of the body. The dissemination of these invaluable, prevention messages ought to include the incorporation of oral health education in the kindergarten through grade 12 public school curriculums. Maryland continues to step up efforts to promote wellness behaviors and teaching oral health education in our public school keeps the state moving in the right direction.

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