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ORAL HEALTH LEGISLATION BUILDS ON EFFORTS IN MARYLAND TO IMPROVE THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

State legislators commended for Oral Health Education Bill. Legislation helps to acceptably gauge the moral compass that may encourage other states to follow.

Baltimore, Maryland (March 30, 2012). Favorable testimony was heard this month for Senate Bill 867, "Oral Health Education – Monitoring and Certification." The legislation was introduced by Senator Joan Carter Conway, Chair of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee. This bill is just another affirmation to the sphere of efforts of the *Old Line State* leadership to improve the oral health of their citizens. It continues to build on the efforts in Maryland to raise oral health awareness.

Senate Bill 867 was identically crossfiled as House Bill 1401 by Delegate Nathaniel T. Oaks and re-referred to the House Ways and Means Committee, chaired by Delegate Sheila E. Hixson. This undertaking speaks to the progressive mindset in Annapolis as Maryland stays the course to elevate the oral health wellbeing of children and families since the preventable death of 12 year-old Deamonte Driver in 2007 from an infected tooth. This legislation to enhance oral health education will not only benefit Marylanders, it may as well, lay the groundwork for the nation. Members of organized dentistry believe the thoughtful wording of the bill will help to acceptably gauge the moral compass for the inclusion of meaningful oral health education in public schools. Implementation of SB 867/HB1401 could encourage other states to follow in the footsteps of Conway, Oaks and Hixson. The legislators have been commended by dental professionals for their support in helping to advance the Oral Health Education bill.

The Oral Health Education – Monitoring and Certification legislation has also received the strong support of Maryland's 7th District Congressman Elijah E. Cummings. Cummings stated, "This bill recognizes the importance of oral health literacy and underscores the relationship between dental care and overall health and wellness." The Congressman continues to work tirelessly to help advance oral health education in Maryland and throughout the country.

Entitled by the Maryland State Department of Education, the bill advises county superintendents to certify and report annually that oral health education, including oral disease prevention and dental health promotion, is being taught in the county. It has support of the Maryland State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Maryland State Board of Dental Examiners, the Maryland Dental Action Coalition, the Maryland Dental Society, the Maryland State Dental Association and The Children's Oral Health Institute. Dr. Harry Goodman, Director of Oral Health for the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene agrees that, "This legislation adds to the efforts by schools and the dental community to help eliminate oral health disparities and improve dental health education for Maryland's schoolchildren." Dr. Debonny Hughes, Dental Director of the Prince George's County Health Department, recognized the impact as well stating, "Maryland schools can be so instrumental in helping to further the access to care progress being made throughout the state by teaching oral health education and promoting dental disease prevention."

Maryland Dental Society

03/30/12

Teachers and dentists also agree that this bill can especially make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and families living in poverty, more often those disproportionately affect by dental disease. Dr. Nathan Fletcher, past president of the National Dental Association and the Maryland Dental Society, stated, "We want children to get the educational support they need from this legislation to help them learn about proper oral health in their everyday classroom setting."

Maryland dentists are invested in the oral health welfare of children and youth as is clear from their passionate support of the, "Oral Health Education," legislation during its early inception stages. In 2008, representatives from organized dentistry joined the Maryland Board of Education to discuss incorporating oral health education in the public school curriculum. Dentists, physicians, legislators, educators and parents believe in the bill and feel it is a mammoth step in the right direction. They believe too that it is right for mankind and look forward to witnessing Governor Martin O'Malley affix his signature to this fundamental legislation; legislation that could play a major role in helping to end the needless suffering children deal with from dental pain everyday in classrooms throughout the nation.

Learn more about Maryland's commitment to the oral health education of children and families by visiting the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene at <http://fha.dhmh.maryland.gov/oralhealth/SitePages/Home.aspx>, Maryland Dental Action Coalition at www.mdac.us, Maryland State Dental Association at www.msda.com, Maryland Academy of General Dentistry at www.maryland-agd.org, Maryland Dental Society, www.themds.org, Maryland Dental Hygiene Association at www.mymdha.com and The Children's Oral Health Institute www.mycphi.org.