

SECTION 10

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

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Legislative Process

The Massachusetts state legislature operates in two-year cycles. These two-year legislative sessions begin in January of odd-numbered years.

We are currently in the first year of the 194th Massachusetts General Court, consisting of the Massachusetts State Senate and the Massachusetts House of Representatives. This session convened on January 1, 2025, and will continue until December 31, 2026; however, the formal session ended on or about July 1, 2026.

At the onset of the legislative session, thousands of pieces of legislation (called dockets) are introduced and assigned to various subject matter committees. These committees are comprised of both senators and representatives from differing political parties.

During this phase, the committee will assign the bill number that will remain with the legislation during its lifetime and hold hearings. Hearings are typically comprised of many bills of similar subject matter. From here, the committee decides if legislation should proceed forward, typically a bill will be reviewed and heard by several different committees before reaching the full House or Senate respectively.

During its lifetime, a bill may be amended, edited, or even combined with legislation of a similar nature into one larger bill (omnibus bill). It can often take an entire legislative session for a bill to be brought to a vote. Bills that are not passed must be re-filed each legislative session.

Communicating with Legislators

During the entire legislative process, the MDS staff and the MDS-contracted lobbyists meet with legislators to ensure that they understand the organization's position on issues that impact the dental profession or the oral health of the residents of the Commonwealth. At the same time, the MDS utilizes online tools to make it easier for the members to contact their individual legislators quickly and confidently regarding these issues.

Throughout the legislative session, the MDS may send emails to members asking them to act on the issues the MDS is advocating for or against. District leaders can play a significant role in getting the message out to their colleagues about taking action. Visit massdental.org/advocacy to learn more about what is happening during the legislative session.

Grassroots Meetings

Additionally, the MDS assists members in hosting informal meetings between local dentists and their legislators. These meetings provide dentists and area legislators with an informal opportunity to discuss issues regarding oral health and the profession of dentistry. This process allows dentists to build relationships with their legislators, helping to advance the legislative initiatives of the MDS.

Additionally, members may be invited to join the MDS director of government affairs and dental practice, in meeting with legislators at the State House to help convey our message. It is vitally important for every lawmaker to be aware of the issues important to dentistry. These meetings are another step in the continuing effort to communicate our concerns to our elected officials by providing the basis from which both sides can develop a stronger working relationship. To schedule a meeting with your legislator, please contact Daniel DiTullio, MDS director of government affairs and dental practice, at 508.449.6021, or dditullio@massdental.org.

MDS-PAC

The MDS Political Action Committee (MDS-PAC) is an independent, nonpartisan political organization solely dedicated to the advancement of the dental profession. The MDS-PAC can support candidates for elected offices, attend fundraisers, and build relationships with political candidates. This connection helps ensure that candidates with oral health interests are elected. Only the MDS-PAC, not the MDS, is allowed to participate in the election process. Legally, the MDS is prohibited from using member dues to support political candidates. Learn more and donate at massdental.org/PAC.

2025-2026 Legislative Agenda

We are pleased to report that the Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) has made substantial progress this session on its priority legislation aimed at protecting patients, supporting oral health providers, and promoting fairness and transparency throughout the Commonwealth's dental care system. Over the past year, the Government Affairs Committee has worked diligently with lawmakers, coalition partners, and regulatory agencies to advance proposals aligned with our mission and the needs of our members. As a result of these efforts, all MDS-supported bills have been released favorably from their initial committees—an essential milestone in the legislative process—and have now advanced to the next stage of review.

Released Favorably and Advanced:

- **S.704 – Virtual Credit Cards** (Sen. John Cronin): Now before the Senate Ways and Means Committee.
- **H.1291 / H.5043 – Patients First Act** (Rep. Angelo Puppolo): Now before the Committee on Health Care Financing.
- **H.1292 / H.5044 – Non-Covered Services** (Rep. Angelo Puppolo): Now before the Committee on Health Care Financing.
- **H.2382 – Office Based Surgical Centers** (Rep. Tacky Chan): Now before the House Committee on Steering, Policy and Scheduling

Additionally, two bills opposed by MDS, one banning public water fluoridation and another which would have reversed the Dental Loss Ratio law, have been sent to study, effectively ending their advancement this session.

The MDS Government Affairs team will continue to monitor all legislation and keep members informed of further developments.

Patients First Update

The Government Affairs Committee issued a communication to all members regarding the forthcoming implementation of the *Patients First Act*, which is scheduled to take effect on **January 1, 2027**, following an extended delay. Despite this upcoming deadline, major uncertainties remain. MDS continues to advocate strongly at the State House for legislation that would fully remove dental care from the law, given the substantial concerns raised by providers across the state.

In anticipation of the law taking effect as written, MDS submitted a comprehensive list of member questions and concerns to the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (HHS). On May 20th, members of the MDS Government Affairs Committee met with representatives from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) and the Board of Registration in Dentistry (BORID) to discuss implementation of the new law. The meeting was productive and provided an opportunity to clearly communicate the dental community's concerns and seek guidance on compliance expectations.

Throughout the discussion, it became apparent that significant questions remain regarding how certain provisions of the law will be interpreted and implemented in practice. Agency representatives acknowledged the operational and enforcement challenges associated with the new requirements and indicated that additional guidance and clarification will likely be needed as implementation moves forward.

The MDS will continue working closely with the State and other stakeholders to ensure providers receive clear, practical direction and that the concerns of the dental community remain part of the ongoing implementation process.

State Budget/Medicaid Cap

In February, the MDS Board of Trustees submitted a letter to Governor Healey, urging the Administration to preserve Medicaid dental funding without reductions. Despite these efforts, the Governor's proposed budget included a \$1,000 annual cap on adult dental benefits, a significant limitation that would restrict access to necessary care for vulnerable populations.

Following the release of the Governor's budget, MDS met with the House Committee on Ways and Means to discuss potential alternatives to the cap, including raising it to \$2000 and exceptions for certain procedures.

Thanks to MDS advocacy, both the House and Senate versions of the budget included an increased cap of \$1750. Furthermore, the Senate added language to ensure it does not drop below that level. Despite additional efforts by the MDS neither chamber accepted the amendments we filed to add exceptions for certain procedures from the cap.

Mid-Level Provider

The Mid-Level Provider bill (**H.4869/S.2854**) continues to advance, having been reported favorably by both the Joint Committee on Public Health and the Senate Committee on Health Care Finance. This proposal would introduce licensure and regulatory oversight for dental therapists—mid-level providers—under the authority of the Board of Registration in Dentistry.

The Massachusetts Dental Society Board of Trustees has voted once again to oppose this legislation, citing concerns about patient safety, workforce oversight, and the potential impact on care quality. MDS continues to call on all members to contact their Representatives and Senators to urge them to oppose any Mid-Level Provider bill in Massachusetts. Member engagement will be critical as this issue moves forward.

Beacon Hill Day 2027

Our next Beacon Hill Day event will take place sometime in the Spring of 2027. Although the exact date has not been set, the committee will begin working on this in the fall of 2026 to give members ample time to plan.