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Massachusetts Dental Society Supports Legislation to Improve Oral Health Care for All Massachusetts Residents

Bill aims to increase access to care, establishes mid-level “dental therapist”

SOUTHBOROUGH, Mass. – April 24, 2018 – The Massachusetts Legislature’s Joint Committee on Public Health has voted to favorably report *An Act to Improve Oral Health Care for All Massachusetts Residents*, a new legislative agreement reached with leadership of the state’s House of Representatives and Senate as well as key advocates and stakeholders.

The Joint Committee on Public Health was referred multiple bills in the 190th Legislative Session that sought to authorize a mid-level oral health provider. This new legislation authorizes a mid-level oral health provider, called a “dental therapist,” within the Board of Registration in Dentistry who will work under the supervision of a dentist to provide increased access to oral health care in the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) President Dr. David Lustbader issued the following statement:

“This outcome represents a real win for Massachusetts because it allows for a comprehensive approach to improving overall dental health for underserved populations. In addition to appropriately trained and supervised dental therapists, the legislation allows for community health workers and local boards of health to receive important oral health education, and for all public school students' parents or legal guardians to be alerted to the importance of oral health screenings for children.

“The legislation will require dental therapists to obtain a bachelor’s and a master’s degree and pass a comprehensive, competency-based clinical examination. It also requires dental therapists to work under direct supervision of a licensed dentist for the first 2,500 hours or first two years of practice, whichever is longer, and to ensure that at least 50 percent of their patients receive coverage through MassHealth or are considered underserved.

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“When the MDS introduced legislation in January 2017 sponsored by Sen. Michael Moore (D-Worcester) and the late Rep. Peter Kocot (D-Northampton), we sought not only to ensure patient safety and promote appropriate licensure standards for a new class of mid-level professionals, we wrote legislation that reflected the urgent need for additional education, prevention, and resources to more effectively address public health challenges associated with underserved populations and access to oral health care. Our goal was and remains to provide Massachusetts residents with a more comprehensive program that promotes preventive care and oral health. That is why the MDS is comfortable supporting this new legislation.

“There are many people to thank for making this legislative agreement possible. This includes Rep. Smitty Pignatelli, Rep. Kate Hogan, chairperson of the Joint Committee on Public Health, and the Pew Charitable Trust, who all put aside agendas and focused on crafting a bill that promotes comprehensive oral care for underserved populations delivered with the highest possible level of safety. We also are grateful to Sen. Moore and the late Rep. Kocot for their leadership in sponsoring the MDS bill, as well as Senate President Harriette Chandler for her leadership on oral health issues, including mid-level providers.

“This outcome is a step forward in providing comprehensive dental care for all Massachusetts residents, but more work lies ahead. As always, the MDS will seek laws and regulations that advance the public interest while preserving the highest principles of dentistry.”

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The [Massachusetts Dental Society](#) (MDS), a 5,000-member professional association and statewide constituent of the American Dental Association, is dedicated to the professional development of its member dentists through initiatives in education, advocacy, the promotion of the highest professional standards, and championing oral health in the Commonwealth. For more information, visit [massdental.org](#), and follow the MDS on Twitter [@MassDental](#).