

**ORAL TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH
BY MASSACHUSETTS DENTAL SOCIETY PRESIDENT DR. JANIS MORIARTY**

November 19, 2019

H.1992 – AN ACT RELATIVE TO DENTAL LICENSING EXAMS

Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairwoman Comerford and Chairman Mahoney for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Dr. Janis Moriarty, and I am President of the Massachusetts Dental Society. The MDS represents more than 5,000—or approximately 80 percent—of dentists in Massachusetts.

Today, I'm here to voice support for *An Act Relative to Dental Licensing Exams*. The MDS believes that a comprehensive and accurate clinical assessment of dental school graduates who are applying for licensure is essential to ensuring safe, quality dental care for Massachusetts residents. However, the current live patient clinical licensing exam is limited in accomplishing this goal, and it puts an excessive burden on graduates and patients alike. This legislation would direct the Board of Registration in Dentistry (BORID) to approve an exam format that is a better metric of an applicant's skills by eliminating the problematic live patient component.

The current live patient exam is an outdated and unrealistic requirement that falls short of providing a quality assessment of an applicant's education and training in three significant ways.

First, it focuses on a limited set of procedures that do not accurately reflect the multifaceted requirements and responsibilities demanded of dentists in everyday clinical practice. In fact, several studies looking at the relationship between performances in dental school compared to results of live patient exams found little or no significant relationship between the two. Members of the committee can read more about this in a [white paper authored by the American Student Dental Association](#), which I will submit for the record.

Second, the live patient exam can actually encourage improper patient care. Applicants often must find patients months in advance of their test date, purposely delaying care in order to have a patient who presents with the qualifying oral health issues. Once in the exam, applicants may need to perform procedures that are unnecessary and potentially harmful while ignoring other pressing issues that require treatment, solely to complete exam requirements. Using live patients in a way that their overall oral health is a secondary concern behind evaluating the applicant sets a poor example for would-be dentists. It also contradicts a licensed dentist's duty to provide

quality and timely care to the patient, as described in the American Dental Association's *Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct*.

Finally, finding and vetting patients who will qualify to sit for an applicant's live exam is exceptionally time-consuming, expensive, and difficult. Once an applicant identifies a potential patient who presents with characteristics that fit the required procedures, the applicant is completely beholden to them to pass his or her exam. The applicant must pay for the patient's travel and lodging expenses, and still have no guarantee that they will appear on exam day. Knowing the implications for applicants if their patient does not show up—that is, failure of the exam—extortion by patients is not unheard of. Patients who show up but are found unqualified by the examiner cause an automatic failing grade for the applicant. This sets applicants back months and causes them to forfeit hundreds of dollars in exam fees.

In conclusion, the live patient clinical exam for licensure of dentists is a poor metric of an applicant's skills, fails to provide adequate medical care for the patient, and puts an unnecessary burden on applicants. It is no wonder the American Dental Association passed a resolution more than a decade ago pushing for the elimination of the live patient exam—an initiative that several states have already adopted, including New York, Connecticut, and California. With more recent exam formats available that have proven to be better evaluations of an applicant's aptitude, a review of current licensing exam practices is long overdue.

The Massachusetts Dental Society encourages the committee to favorably report this bill out of committee and allow BORID greater latitude in how it evaluates applicants for dental licensure.