

The Honorable Cindy Friedman, Chair
The Honorable Jennifer Benson, Chair
Joint Committee on Health Care Financing
State House Room 236
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairwoman Friedman and Chairwoman Benson:

The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) supports Senate Bill 704 and House Bill 1129, An Act to Provide Medicaid Coverage for Tobacco Cessation. The MDS represents approximately 80% of dentists in the Commonwealth through initiatives in education, advocacy, and promotion of the highest professional standards. As the leading authority on oral health care in the Commonwealth, we take great pride in championing oral health and lending the voice of dentistry to worthy initiatives that can make a difference in the lives of residents across the Bay State.

The MassHealth smoking cessation benefit was a tremendous success when it was introduced in Fiscal Year 2007.¹ In fact, the smoking rate among MassHealth beneficiaries decreased from 38% in 2006 to 28% in 2008.² However, certain providers, including dentists and behavioral health providers, were not included. Closing the loophole would enable certified professionals in these fields to counsel, and bill for, tobacco cessation for their MassHealth patients.

If passed, this legislation would close loopholes in the MassHealth tobacco cessation benefit and expand access to cessation counseling by allowing trained and approved dentists and behavior health practitioners to provide cessation counseling to patients on MassHealth, as recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Reducing tobacco use is a priority issue for the MDS due to the oral health complications caused by smoking and tobacco products. In addition to heart disease, lung disease, and other health problems, tobacco use has been associated with serious oral health impacts including gum disease and oral cancer.

The MDS joins fellow members of the Tobacco Free Mass Coalition in urging the legislature to pass An Act to Provide Medicaid Coverage for Tobacco Cessation to help increase access to tobacco cessation counseling that would improve the overall and oral health of MassHealth patients.

Sincerely,

Dr. Howard M. Zolot
President
Massachusetts Dental Society

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/coordinatedchronic/pdf/tobacco_cessation_factsheet_508_compliant.pdf

² <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0009770>