



Shannon Sweeney, RDH
House Bill 360 Proponent Testimony
House Commerce and Labor Committee
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Chair Manning, Vice Chair Dean, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan and members of the committee, my name is Shannon Sweeney and I am President of the Ohio Dental Hygienists' Association (ODHA) and on behalf of the members of ODHA I am writing to express our support for House Bill 360, which would require water bottle filling stations and drinking fountains in certain public school buildings.

As dental hygienists we see a variety of scenarios when pediatric and adolescent patients present in the dental office. Many times, it is the basic needs of children who need to do a better job of brushing their teeth or attempt to create a flossing routine. However, there are patients that we treat that have significant decay. There are many reasons that can attribute to these situations. One of the more prevalent reasons that is emerging is the consumption of non-water liquids. As children are encouraged to become more active there is also a corresponding desire to ensure that they are properly hydrated. However, it is possible that the increased use of these hydration-related products that could be contributing to increased dental issues.

As practitioners we need to educate our patient's parents. There are so many parents who do not understand the effects of sugar on our teeth. I do not argue that the drink companies have a product to sell. However, with children participating in year-round sports activities the use of energy-electrolyte drinks is more prevalent. Many parents believe that they are providing a benefit to their children by providing these types of drinks. Children acquire a taste for the product and believe that they need the drink as a replacement for any physical activity or even just casual consumption. However, consider that each 16.9 oz. bottle has 32 grams of sugar. That is equivalent to 8 teaspoons of sugar. At this level, in elementary school especially, the kids need only water for their replacement. We do need nutrient and fluid replacement, but not with something that has 8 teaspoons of sugar. Especially to kids who only weigh 40-60 pounds.

After prolonged use, the sad part of all of this is explaining to moms that their child has dental decay. The looks on their face shows total devastation. They are at a loss for words. Their eyes swell up with tears as they try to hold them back, but then the tears begin to flow, and they begin to apologize to us. They feel horrible, they blame themselves and they say they didn't know. We reassure them that the children are receiving treatment and we will take care of the areas of concern.

Hygienists educate parents that decay does not have to happen to their child. We educate parents to have their kids drink water between meals, brush twice daily, floss daily, use a fluoride toothpaste, have a specific snack time and no grazing on food all day. We assure the parents that there are times when kid's requests for certain beverages should be denied. The kids need guidance because they do not know what the consequences will be. However, let me be clear that we are not advocating to eliminate the availability of soft drinks and sports drinks to children. We believe that they should be accessed in moderation and with appropriate parental education and supervision.

This is why House Bill 360 is so important. If school age children are provided the opportunity to have access to bottle stations, mainly, at their school buildings they will be more likely to drink water as the main source of hydration throughout the day. As more children are utilizing fitness trackers and cell phones, they are more proactively taking control of their health and their bodies. They are challenging each other, their parents and even their teachers on activity they are getting, including how much water they are drinking each day.

Anecdotally, many schools are permitting its students to bring and refill water bottles each day. They are incorporating lessons on ecology and waste management through the counters on the bottle filling stations that show the number of plastic bottles that are diverted from being used by refilling a reusable water container. Additionally, many schools or their parent organizations are issuing students water bottles at the beginning of the school year to encourage water consumption. As school buildings are continuing to go through the process of upgrading, remodeling, or constructing new buildings to address the needs of the school or the district, we agree with the premise of the bill to require school designs to incorporate bottle filling stations in the plans.

The physical and environmental benefits of the installation of these bottle filling stations are demonstrable. As practitioners who deal in the health side of this equation, we encourage the consumption of water as much as possible. Therefore, we are happy to support Representatives Crawley and Hillyer and House Bill 360.

We urge the committee and the House to pass House Bill 360. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.