



**Senate Medicaid Committee
HB 64 Testimony
May 14, 2015**

Chairman Burke, Vice Chairman Manning, Ranking Minority Member Cafaro, and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 64.

My name is Lindy Cree and I operate the Dental Center of Northwest Ohio, a facility that has allowed me to have firsthand knowledge of the challenges faced by dental providers who treat a significant amount of people covered by Medicaid. [INSERT HERE INFO ABOUT OPERATION – SAFETY NET, TOTAL PATIENTS PER YEAR, PAYER MIX, ONLY PROVIDER OR ONE OF FEW PROVIDERS IN REGION WHO SEE UNINSURED AND MEDICAID – SOMETHING TO THAT EFFECT] I also serve as the co-chair of the Children's Oral health Action Team (COHAT). COHAT was formed as a result of the Ohio Department of Health Director's Task Force on Oral Health and Access to Dental Care in 2009. COAHT is a team of more than 30 member organizations focused on improving children's oral health through education and advocacy.

COHAT is dedicated to ensuring that quality oral health services are available to every child in our state, and because of that, we have maintained a long-term focus on Ohio's Medicaid reimbursement rates for dental services. Ohio's dental reimbursements have not been adjusted in 15 years and the reimbursement levels have fallen to below 40% of a dentist's regular fee for services. Ohio's Medicaid dental fees rank 41st out of 50 states in the nation.

The Ohio Department of Health declared dental care the number one unmet health need of Ohio's children and we thank Governor Kasich for his acknowledgement that the dental reimbursements must be raised with his proposed dental provider rates increase of 1% in House Bill 64. While we appreciate the 1% increase, we believe that more needs to be done in order to make Ohio's dental Medicaid program viable. For most services, current reimbursement rates do not even cover the overhead for treating Medicaid patients, and because of that, offices that currently treat Medicaid patients are facing a serious crisis.

Unfortunately, the reality is many dental offices are cutting back on the number of Medicaid patients they serve, or are deciding to simply stop treating Medicaid patients because of the increasing costs and flat reimbursement rates for dental services. Having a viable dental Medicaid program ensures that state dollars are

used efficiently by ensuring patients can access care in the dental office and in dental clinics, which is much more cost effective than in hospital emergency departments. ED's often treat the symptoms with prescriptions for pain and infection, but are not equipped to treat the underlying oral health issue.

It is worth repeating that dental care is already the number one unmet health need of Ohio's children. Today, we are urging members of this committee and the General Assembly to build on the process of Medicaid funding, and help increase reimbursement rates for Medicaid to a sustainable level. By doing this, we can help reverse the trend of declining dental service access for low-income families and children and help ensure that every child grows up ready and able to learn. Further, numerous studies conclude oral health is absolutely critical to good overall health. In fact, dental disease has been associated with heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and low birth-weight babies. It goes without saying, one cannot have good overall health without having good oral health.

With that said, we are asking that funding be provided to raise Ohio's Medicaid dental reimbursements by 10-12%. This will allow more dentists to participate in the Medicaid program, will keep Ohio's dental safety net clinics open and functioning, and most importantly will improve access to dental care for Ohio's most vulnerable patients.

Again, on behalf of COHAT, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 64. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them at this time.