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Children's Dental Services**

**House Health Committee
House Bill 541 Proponent Testimony
May 16, 2018**

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairwoman Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the committee, I am Elizabeth Branca from Children's Dental Services in Minnesota and I am providing a proponent statement on behalf of my colleagues to support House Bill 541, sponsored by Representatives Patterson and LaTourette.

I am a dental therapist (DT) in Minnesota and I have been in practice since 2013. I also have been a dental hygienist for 24 years. I work for a public health dental clinic seeing children and pregnant women for exams, preventative and restorative dental work. I go to schools, Headstarts, WIC offices and community centers throughout the state to see patients. Dental therapists are mid-level practitioners, like physician assistants. Under the general supervision of a dentist and working under a collaborative management agreement, DTs can perform routine dental procedures either at a dental practice or in satellite clinics in underserved areas. My work as a dental therapist has been one in which I have seen many patients of various ages and oral health status. Services performed by dental therapists are limited in scope and include preventive care (like exams and sealants), basic restorative care (like filling cavities) and also non-surgical extractions of primary and some permanent teeth.

My interest in House Bill 541 stems from the contact with colleagues in your state and the notice of the recent Remote Area Medical event that occurred in Ashtabula, Ohio. I was interested in participating, but there was a licensure limitation that I will explain which prohibited my attendance. It is my understanding that people could choose between dental or vision services and could return for a second day if they wanted the second service; I have not heard reports from the event of any numbers of patients receiving dental care (or didn't receive care). The organizers have stated the limitation on the services are due to a lack of providers to deliver care. As the bill is currently drafted, I or other dental therapists from other states would be prohibited from participating in the Ashtabula event because Ohio does not currently license dental therapists or advanced dental therapists. If Ohio is in the position to accept free donated care from this type of

“mission trip” and services are being rationed for lack of providers, it would seem logical that an all hands-on deck approach would be a method that should be explored.

House Bill 541 allows care to be provided by out-of-state dentists and dental hygienists that are licensed in other states. I understand Ohio is debating the need for dental therapists and dental hygiene therapists and it is not the intent of this request to add this position in law. My request simply is to allow a recognition of a licensee under the guidelines of their home state, to practice here even though Ohio does not license a similar practitioner.

Ohio is in a position similar to Minnesota was when we initially authorized dental therapists; there are significant pockets of lack of access to routine dental care. There were concerns about dental therapy regarding training, education, and supervision. Many of these apprehensions have been diminished by the quality services provided by dental therapist/advanced dental therapists and the dental practices that have embraced dental therapy have seen their practices grow. Additionally the backlog of patients statewide needing preventive and restorative care is diminishing. Arguments against unsupervised or substandard care here in Ohio can be mitigated through these events because dentists will be participating and providing onsite supervision, just as they do in other states that utilize this practitioner.

As a Dental therapist, I have a Master’s degree, passed the same clinical regional board exams as dentists in my state, am licensed by the Minnesota Board of Dentistry and carry my own professional liability insurance so there is no concern about patients being adversely harmed. In fact, Minnesota has not leveled any safety violations against a dental therapist. Utilizing dental therapists/advanced dental therapists like me or my colleagues from Alaska and Minnesota, could allow more patients to be seen during these types of events because their scope of practice is narrowly focused on restorative issues like filling cavities, freeing up the volunteer dentists to perform the more involved procedures for patients. Allowing dental therapists/advanced dental therapists to participate in these events could prove to be a good pilot project for Ohio to show the effectiveness of this practitioner. Ohio has literally nothing to lose with the allowance of these practitioners to participate on a limited basis in these types of events.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I support House Bill 541 and the works of groups like RAM Volunteer Corps coming to Ohio to provide these services. It is my hope that House Bill 541 passes, but with language that would allow me and

my colleagues to come to Ohio for future events to provide free care to your friends and neighbors.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Branca RDH, ADT

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