



**John DuBois, DDS & Stephen Sliter, DDS
Comfort Dental Circleville, Ohio
Proponent Testimony on Substitute House Bill 33
Senate Medicaid Committee
May 11, 2023**

Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Substitute House Bill 33.

My name is Dr John DuBois and this is Dr. Stephen Sliter. We own and operate Comfort Dental in Circleville. We are one of twenty-five doctor-owned Comfort Dental franchise practices in Ohio, operating with a model that predominantly treats Medicaid adults and children. Our statewide group is one of the largest Medicaid dental providers in Ohio. Most of our offices see 50-100 patients a day. Approximately 80% of them are Medicaid patients.

Ohio is currently experiencing a crisis in access to dental care for its Medicaid population. Let me give you a typical scenario that happens in our office to illustrate.

A Medicaid patient drives one and half hours to our office because their dentist no longer accepts Medicaid, and they have no other options closer to home. This is happening daily in all of our offices. Ohio's taxpayers would be lucky if all Medicaid patients did this, but sadly the alternative scenarios are more common. These include a patient forgoing dental treatment or going to a hospital emergency room. Both scenarios are dramatically more expensive to the state.

The average cost of an ER visit in Ohio as of December 2022 is \$1435. At current rates, we are reimbursed \$57.69 to extract a tooth from a patient who is having a debilitating dental emergency. Not only is that 25x more expensive per encounter, but also in most circumstances, no definitive care was provided to the patient and these patients are referred from the ER to us for treatment. The taxpayer pays twice.

Neglected oral health has been shown to negatively affect systemic health concerns like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, dementia and pregnancy complications, all of which are costly to Medicaid.

Substitute House Bill 33 will alleviate this crisis. It provides funding in the Medicaid Health Care Services line item to move Ohio's Medicaid dental service fees to 70% of current rates being paid in Ohio by private insurers. We urge the Senate to pass HB 33 with this critical provision intact.

You have heard in previous testimony that Ohio ranks 42nd nationally in Medicaid reimbursement fees as a percentage of private insurance fees, and that Ohio's dental Medicaid reimbursement fees have not been increased for two decades. A recent American Dental Association study found that in states that pay at least 70% the amount of private fees there is an increase in the number of dentists participating in their Medicaid program.

We need more dentists to treat medicaid patients. Equally important, **we need to keep the safety net of dentists** currently taking Medicaid patients. But the current situation is making it impossible even for us to do so.

The lack of increased reimbursements, inflation, cost-of-doing business increases, staffing challenges, and pandemic challenges have all come together to create a desperate situation. For the first time in our franchise history, one of our offices located in Hamilton closed its doors this past year, unable to overcome these issues. That office was already being swamped by Medicaid patients unable to find a local provider.

The amount of money spent on Medicaid dental services is a small proportion of the overall program, but it saves you money by keeping people out of emergency rooms and preventing expensive chronic illness. A continued exodus of providers willing to see Medicaid patients will ultimately be very costly.

I know that in light of much of the testimony this committee has heard it would be easy to see us as a couple doctors asking for more money. This is about the patients. We want to continue treating them and we want Medicaid patients around Ohio to have access to care. From our perspective, that is good health. From your perspective, it is sound fiscal policy.

We are grateful to Governor DeWine and to the House for recognizing the looming crisis is dental access to care and for including additional funding in Substitute House Bill 33 for Medicaid dental services. We urge you to support these provisions in the bill.

Chair Romanchuk and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing us to share the provider perspective to this challenge and we are happy to answer your questions.