



Children's Oral Health Action Team

HB 64 Testimony

Ohio House Finance and Appropriations Committee

March 25th, 2015

Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Schuring, Ranking Member Driehaus, thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 64. My name is Sandy Oxley and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Voices for Ohio's Children. Voices for Ohio's Children is the non-partisan voice for Ohio's nearly three million children. Our mission is to advocate for public policy that improves the well-being of Ohio's children and their families by building non-partisan collaborations among the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors. Our vision is for children's interests to be at the top of every community's agenda so all of Ohio's children are poised for success.

Voices is known as a leader on many issues that impact children, such as early care and education, youth development, children's health, and children's oral health. However, this testimony focuses solely on children's oral health, which is a policy area in which Voices provides leadership because we recognize that poor oral health in childhood leads to negative lifelong health consequences. We also know that oral health is the number one unmet healthcare need for Ohio's children.

Along with my colleague Lindy Cree from the Dental Center of Northwest Ohio, I have the privilege of serving 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. COHAT is a team of more than 30 member organizations focused on improving children's oral health through education and advocacy.

Because COHAT is dedicated to ensuring that quality oral health services are available to every child in our state, we have maintained a long term focus on Ohio's Medicaid reimbursement rates for dental services. As you may know, our state's Medicaid dental fees rank 41st out of 50 states in the nation. Ohio's Medicaid dental fees have not been adjusted in 15 years, and currently reimburse at less than 40% of a dentist's regular fee for most oral health services.

Attached to this testimony is a letter from my colleague Lindy Cree, who operates a safety net dental clinic in northwest Ohio. As you will see, she has firsthand knowledge of the challenges faced by dental providers that treat a significant amount of people covered by Medicaid.

Dentists and dental offices who currently treat Medicaid patients are facing a serious crisis. Many dental offices are being compelled to cut back on the number of Medicaid patients they serve or are deciding to simply stop treating Medicaid patients because of continually increasing costs and flat, inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rates for dental services. Some providers that treat substantial numbers of Medicaid patients are having to shut down their practices as dentists reach retirement age. This happens because the value of their practices has been so degraded by these increasingly inadequate rates that it is too difficult to find others to take them over.

We know that dental care is already the number one unmet health need of Ohio's children. Consequently, COHAT believes that this issue can and should be addressed during this state budget cycle. We applaud

the Governor and his Administration for including some additional funding for Medicaid dental services in a state budget for the first time since the year 2000. Today, we are urging members of this committee and the Ohio General Assembly to build on this progress and increase Medicaid reimbursement rates to a sustainable level. Doing so will help reverse the trend of declining dental service access for low income families and children. By giving low-income families and children greater access to oral health services, we are making an investment in our states future and helping to ensure that every child grows up ready to learn and poised for a successful and productive adulthood.

On behalf of COHAT and Voices for Ohio's Children, thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony regarding HB 64. If you have any questions about this testimony or about COHAT in general, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at sandy@raiseyourvoiceforkids.org, or to contact my colleague Lindy Cree at LCree@dentalcenterwo.org .