

**Dr. Paul Casamassimo
Proponent Testimony on House Bill 184**

**Health Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
Proponent Testimony
June 7, 2017
9:00 A.M.
Room 121**

Dr. Chairman, esteemed members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important piece of legislation that will help all Ohioans achieve oral health.

My name is Paul Casamassimo. I am a pediatric dentist and have treated patients in Ohio since 1988 at both Nationwide Children's Hospital and the Ohio State University College of Dentistry, caring mainly for poor children and children and adults with special health care needs. As of today, I am professor emeritus at the Ohio State University, but continue to care for children at Nationwide Children's Hospital.

Today, I want to provide testimony on HB 184 which is the latest effort by advocates in dentistry to improve the oral health of Ohioans. I believe it is important for the committee to appreciate the perspective of HB184 as it relates to previous efforts by oral health advocates, the gains that have been made in reaching optimal oral health for our fellow citizens and how HB184 will continue that positive movement.

The Ohio Dental Association, the Children's Oral Health Action Team comprising child advocates from across Ohio, the Ohio Department of Health, our two dental schools and numerous dental residency programs and over a hundred safety net organizations have worked tirelessly to improve oral health across the State in my almost 30 years in Ohio.

And we have made tremendous progress. You have been provided the most recent benchmarks of success that can be attributed to the oral health advocates I just mentioned, but I want to highlight just a few. In the most recent Ohio Department of Health statewide survey of third-graders, we found that 80 percent had seen a dentist, almost twice the national average. Our state's sealant programs, which place protective coatings on the permanent teeth most susceptible to tooth decay, are considered among the best in the nation and our achievement of 49 percent of children who need sealants, is almost twice the number of children as the national average! We have seen that the rate of untreated decay in Ohio's children is declining dramatically which translates into thousands of our children being free from pain and infection from tooth decay.

Our two dental schools have worked diligently to produce a workforce of committed dentists who want to remain in Ohio and today, our population-to-dentist ratio at 1700:1 is far better than the national average of 2590:1.

A trail of legislation over the last several years has aimed to maximize the ability of the dental team to use their training and skills to improve Ohio's oral health and HB 184 is the logical "next step" to reach even more of our citizens through technology, and ease of dentists to establish dental homes in shortage areas of our state. The proposed teledentistry advance would mean that those unable to reach a dentist can now benefit from his or her services in real time. Trained and capable dental team members will now be able to work together to provide care that will mean less pain and suffering. This approach is working in other states and we want to match those results!

Our fellow citizens' ability to access a dentist's services will be enhanced by the changes to the dentist loan repayment program, a program funded totally by Ohio dentists. That change in conjunction with the commitment of our two dental schools to train dentists for Ohio, and the inclusion of dentistry in Ohio First and licensure portability, will mean that all of us will be better able to find dental care in our community. Our population-to-dentist ratio will certainly improve, especially in those communities most in need of access. This bill makes Ohio not just hospitable to the dental community, but shows we are serious about getting care to our fellow Ohio citizens.

My plea to you and our legislative decision-makers is to consider the progress we have made just in my professional lifetime in Ohio and commit to further improvements through HB184. The data show unequivocally that oral health is improving and our existing health care system of dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants are responding to this public health problem. Prevention of oral disease instead of just fixing its destruction, is within our grasp and the passage of HB184 will make the reality of a pain-free life and access to a dental home realities for more Ohioans.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and I will try to answer any questions.