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6th Ohio Senate District

Committees:
Education (Chair)
Finance
Finance- Primary and Secondary Education
Subcommittee
Ways and Means
Health, Human Services, and Medicaid
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Senate Bill 98 Sponsor Testimony **March 21, 2017**

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Beagle, Ranking Member Tavares, and the members of the Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 98, which would establish licensure for dental therapists..

Today in Ohio, access to oral health care is the number one unmet health need for children and low-income adults. The Ohio Department of Health recently released the Third Grade Oral Health Screening survey results for the years 2013-15. While more schoolchildren have had dental sealants and have seen a dentist, progress in preventing cavities and treating decay has stalled. The survey results show that even though tooth decay is preventable, more than half of Ohio schoolchildren had a history of tooth decay in their primary or permanent teeth.

According to 2015 data from the Ohio Department of Health, almost 340,000 children in Ohio have never been to a dentist. Adults don't fare much better. About 45 percent of adults in Ohio have had one or more permanent teeth removed due to tooth decay or gum disease. Nearly 37 percent of Ohio's poorest seniors have had all of their teeth removed.

Ohio's oral health care problem becomes exacerbated by the fact that there are geographic areas and communities with severe dental shortages. In the U.S., nearly 5,500 communities are designated dental health professional shortage areas. Ohio has 88 of these communities with too few dentists to meet the population's needs.

The Health Resources and Services Administration in the U.S. Health and Human Services Agency, shows that all 50 states are projected to see their dentist supply be outpaced by demand between 2012 and 2025. In Ohio, we already are experiencing a shortage of dentists especially in the health professional shortage areas. The report states that Ohio's projected supply of dentists will decrease by 2025. In 2012, Ohio had 6,260 dentists. By 2025 the number of dentists in our state is projected to be just 5,887. Ohio will be "short" 627 dentists to meet the demand in 2025.

Senate Bill 98 addresses the dental provider shortage now before the problem worsens. It is the first comprehensive proposal to reform Ohio's dental workforce laws. Team-based dental care that includes skilled mid-level practitioners can increase access to quality in a

comprehensive, cost-effective way. This evidence-based approach to expanding access to oral health care through mid-level providers will modernize our state's dental practice that is currently on its way to leaving millions of Ohioans without care in the coming years.

SB 98 makes four improvements to the dental care workforce with a priority on expanding access to care in underserved areas:

- It will reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens on dental hygienists so they are able to provide their services to the full benefit of their education and training under general supervision of the dentist. This will allow hygienists to provide cleanings and preventive care in settings where a dentist may not be physically present.
- It will allow dental therapists to practice, under the supervision of a dentist, in Ohio. A dental therapist is specially trained in a limited number of restorative and preventive procedures including filling cavities and performing non-surgical extractions. By allowing dental therapists to perform a small number of routine services, dentists are freed up to focus on more complex cases or patients with multiple needs. Under this legislation, a dental therapist would perform 35 procedures compared to a dentist who is licensed to provide more than 500 procedures.
- While Ohio has a shortage of dentists, the same is not true for dental hygienists. Hygienists would be able to take additional education and be licensed to practice as a hygienist and a dental therapist.
- To ensure that the new providers are working in communities with the greatest need, the practice of dental therapists would be limited to dental health professional shortage areas and with dentists who have 20 percent or more of their patient caseload from the Medicaid population.

Dental hygienists and dental therapists would **always** work under the supervision of the dentist. The choice to hire and use a dental therapist lies with the supervising dentist.

Dr. Donald Berwick, president emeritus and senior fellow at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, said that "Proper dental care is as much a human right and as smart an investment as is proper medical care." By passing SB 98, we recognize that oral health is as important as any other part of the human body, and will finally address the need of low-income Ohioans for treatment of oral issues that could turn into major, potentially fatal, infections.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today and Senator Thomas and I will take any questions you have.