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**Committees:**

Judiciary – Ranking Member  
Local Government, Public Safety,  
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Education  
Rules and Reference  
Ways and Means  
Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education

**Sponsor Testimony: SB 98 Licensing of Dental Therapists  
Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee**

Thank you, Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Beagle, and Ranking Member Tavares for allowing me to speak on SB 98. I want to share some data with you today.

According to our Ohio Department of Health, in their “Statewide Primary Care Needs Assessment” covering 2015-2016, Ohio has 6,174 licenses dentists. The ratio of Ohio’s adult and juvenile population to dentists is 2,166 to 1.

This same report designated certain areas in Ohio as “Health Professional Shortage Areas” for the medical, dental, and mental health practices. These are the areas in Ohio lacking adequate medical, dental, or mental health services. Out of those 3 service fields, dentistry is by far the most lacking.

According to the report, the need for access to dental care has been identified in 58 of Ohio’s 88 counties through this Health Professional Shortage Area designation. Further, 13 counties were designated as shortage areas with “high need”, and, of the 13 high need areas, 7 are in high need of dental services.

This lack of dental care has a greater impact on the low-income population. Of the 6,174 practicing dentists, only 1,529 accept Medicaid patients. Further, many health care plans do not cover dental care.

Complicating this problem is lack of access to a fluoride water supply. We have 21 counties in Ohio where a majority of the population is unlikely to have access to water with fluoride.

A positive note is that Ohio has 147 dental safety net sites in 53 of our 88 counties, and we offer a state student loan repayment program to encourage dentists to work in under-served areas. In 2015, 8 dentists practiced in dental shortage areas through this program. Thankfully we have safety nets, but clearly they are not enough to meet the demand for dental care.

I anticipate that this will spark a debate, but it is a much-needed conversation. How can expect our children to grow with confidence when they are embarrassed to even crack a smile?

Every senator in this room represents constituents who cannot get the dental care they need. We all have dental shortage areas in our districts. We must fix this lack of dental access problem in Ohio. This legislation is a step in the right direction. I ask for your support.