Testimony of Steve Wagner, Executive Director

Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio

Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 98

Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee

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Chairman Burke, members of the Committee thank you for considering Senate Bill 98. Please support improving access for the children and adults in Ohio who can’t get oral health care.

**Ohio has significant gaps in Oral Health Care**

In Ohio, Oral Health is the highest unmet health care need for children. For adults only prescription drugs have a higher unmet need. Among Adults Ages 19 Years and Older about 13% had Unmet Dental Care Needs and 5% of children Unmet Dental Care Needs.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Even though tooth decay can be prevented, about 23 percent of Ohio’s pre-school-age children ages 3-5 years had already experienced one or more cavities in their primary (baby) teeth. About 14 percent of children had cavities that had not yet been treated. • Ohio’s preschool-age children had a higher prevalence of untreated cavities than children in the U.S. (14 percent vs. 10 percent).[[2]](#endnote-2)

In Ohio there are 92 Dental Heath Professional Shortage Areas.[[3]](#endnote-3) The U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration has estimated that more than 8,000 additional dentists are needed to serve the nearly 60 million Americans who live in 5,735 dental care shortage areas across the country.

**Dental Therapists increase access**

Global studies show high and steadily increasing enrollment in school dental programs over time, and reveal their positive influence in improving access to care for large numbers of children.

Dental therapists often work in their home communities allowing them to establish a high level of trust with patients improving their experiences and outcomes. In just over a decade, leaders in Alaska Native communities have built a group of highly skilled American Indian/Alaska Native dental therapists who share the language and culture of the more than 45,000 people they serve.

**Dental Therapists increase competition**

The Federal Trade Commission noted that expanding the supply of dental therapists by facilitating the creation of new dental therapy training programs is likely to increase the output of basic dental services, enhance competition, reduce costs, and expand access to dental care.[[4]](#endnote-4) This could especially be true for underserved populations.

In dental care, as in other areas of health care, workforce modifications expanding the use of mid-level providers can increase the supply of basic services and improve the overall quality of care. Because the oral health workforce is not well distributed, access to dental care is inadequate in many areas.

If competition is hindered by laws that reserve the provision of even simpler services to more highly trained professionals, access may be compromised and cost savings may be inhibited.

Competition is at the core of America’s economy, and vigorous competition among sellers in an open marketplace gives consumers the benefits of lower prices, higher quality products and services, and innovation.

I ask that you consider how this bill will help bring care to many people across Ohio and create a better market for care. Please vote SB98 out of committee.

Attachments:

1. **DENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SHORTAGE AREAS IN OHIO**
2. **Commentary: One Change to Dental Care that Could Save Lives, Money by Grover Norquist and Don Berwick**
1. 2015 Family Health Survey <http://grc.osu.edu/omas/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Third Grade Oral Health Screening Survey, Ohio Department of Health data brief <http://www.odh.ohio.gov/-/media/ODH/ASSETS/Files/ohs/oral-health/2017/Access-to-Dental-Care.pdf?la=en> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.odh.ohio.gov/-/media/ODH/ASSETS/Files/ohs/oral-health/2018/HPSA-weblist-1_2018.pdf?la=en> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Federal Trade Commission letter to the Commission on Dental Accreditation <https://www.ftc.gov/sites/default/files/documents/advocacy_documents/ftc-staff-comment-commission-dental-accreditation-concerning-proposed-accreditation-standards-dental/131204codacomment.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)