

**Proponent Testimony, HB33**  
**House Finance Subcommittee on Health & Human Services**  
**March 22, 2023**

**Homa Amini, DDS, MPH, MS**  
**Ohio Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, Public Policy Advocate**

Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health & Human Services-

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony on HB33 related to oral health. My name is Homa Amini and I am a pediatric dentist at Nationwide Children's Hospital and a clinical professor at the Ohio State University College of Dentistry. I also serve as the Ohio Academy of Pediatric Dentistry Public Policy advocate.

I am writing in support of increasing Ohio Medicaid dental reimbursement rates, which have not changed in the past 20 years. While the proposed 15% increase in the Governor DeWine's budget is a step in the right direction, this is not enough to adequately address oral health disparities faced by Ohioans with the greatest need. To make a meaningful impact, I urge you to support raising Ohio's dental Medicaid fees to levels that are closer to market fees (e.g., 70th percentile range of Usual and Customary Rates).

The most vulnerable populations in our community are covered by Medicaid, including Ohioans with disabilities, Ohioans with low incomes, and Ohioans living in rural or Appalachian regions. 1.34 million Ohio children from every corner of the state rely on Medicaid for healthcare coverage. About 36,000 youth in foster care are served by Medicaid. However, the system has failed to provide an adequate network of Medicaid dental providers statewide to address the unmet dental needs in Ohio. As the result, many children suffer from dental pain, infections, swollen faces, hospitalization and need dental surgery under general anesthesia, which is very costly and could have been prevented by having routine dental checkups.

Our dental clinic at Nationwide Children's is overwhelmed by the number of walk-in emergency patients who present with pain and infection during the daytime or after hours. Receiving a page from the emergency department at 2 AM to take care of a child who has not been able to sleep at night due to dental pain has become a routine for our dental residents. Weekly hospital admissions of young children with swollen faces due to tooth decay has become a norm. Many families who come to our clinic travel 2-3 hours, and their child has already been on multiple rounds of antibiotics without having their dental needs addressed.

In 2007, a 12-year-old boy from Maryland by the name of Deamonte Driver died from lack of access to dental care. His mother could not find a dentist who would accept Medicaid to manage his toothache. As a result, bacteria from the untreated tooth infection spread to his brain. After two surgeries and six weeks of hospital care, Deamonte died. Due to this tragedy,

Maryland Medicaid fees were increased substantially which resulted in significant improvement in access to dental care for children from low-income families.

Let's not wait to have a tragedy in the state of Ohio in order to take action. Let's be part of the solution to ensure there will never be another Deamonte Driver again. On behalf of Ohio children who have difficulty accessing dental care, I respectfully ask for your support of this matter in a meaningful way.

If I can answer any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Homa Amini".

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