



Senate Finance Committee  
May 25, 2023

Randy Leite  
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Proponent Testimony, HB33

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony supporting the proposed increase in Medicaid reimbursement for dentists in HB33.

My name is Randy Leite, and I am the Executive Director of the Appalachian Children Coalition, an alliance of behavioral health, education, and social service professionals from the 32-county Appalachian region seeking public and private solutions to our region's most acute needs.

Low Medicaid reimbursement rates are a barrier to dental care access across Ohio and especially in Ohio's Appalachian region; an area representing approximately 40% of the state's landmass and approximately 25% of its population. Despite Medicaid's dental benefits, beneficiaries are simply not receiving the care they need when they need it. This is in part because dentists cannot afford to provide care at the current reimbursement rate, which has resulted in considerable gaps in dental care access in our region, especially in Ohio's southern and southeastern counties. The geographic distance Appalachian Ohioans must travel to see a Medicaid dental provider is an additional barrier to dental care, resulting in unmet dental need. This is compounded by the lack of public transportation options across most of the region. When Ohioans experience pain, fevers, and infections because of poor oral health, families with limited access to dental care often have little choice but to seek care at their local hospital emergency department. Emergency department care – for what are preventable dental problems – is more expensive, a poor use of taxpayer and family dollars, and does not address the root cause of the dental problem.

Good oral health is necessary for overall health. When people cannot access the dental care they need, it impacts their ability to learn and to work. Senator Dolan and members of the committee, the Senate has done much in recent years to address child health issues in our region. Raising reimbursement rates for dental care would be an important step in enhancing access to an area of healthcare that remains as a significant deficit in the Appalachian region and across Ohio. I encourage you to vote to increase Medicaid dental reimbursement rates, which have not increased in over twenty years. This action is a step in the right direction to reduce barriers to access to oral health care and result in healthier Ohioans.



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