

**An open letter to Connecticut Governor M. Jodi Rell**

February 5, 2009

Dear Governor Rell,

The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI) urges you to reconsider and retract your proposal to eliminate dental care except in an emergency for the 230,000 low-income Connecticut parents and other adults who are enrolled in Medicaid (HUSKY, SAGA and Medicaid).

We strongly object to this plan because it would result in:

- 1) An increase in painful, dangerous and expensive health problems – including abscesses, infection, diabetes, heart disease, pneumonia, oral cancers, dental caries and periodontal disease – associated with lack of dental services and poor oral health
- 2) More pre-term births, low birth weight babies and other serious and expensive complications at delivery because of the poor oral health of mothers
- 3) Increased transmission of the bacteria that causes dental caries from parents to their newborns and young children
- 4) More emergency room visits to already overburdened hospitals and unreimbursed visits to struggling community dental clinics
- 5) Worsening nutrition, particularly among the elderly and disabled

In your budget address, you called for getting back to the state's "core mission" including to "help those truly in need." Cutting these dental services will dramatically affect those you wish to help: low-income adults who won't be able to take advantage of your new \$1.7 million dollar nutrition program due to severe periodontal disease; pregnant women age 21 and older at greater risk for delivery complications; parents who will unknowingly cause caries in their young children; disabled adults especially vulnerable to systemic health problems resulting from poor oral health; and adults seeking jobs who can't concentrate or sleep or are embarrassed to open their mouths due to unsightly decay.

Eliminating dental services means adults will seek more emergency care and incur astronomical costs, pain, suffering, and life-threatening infections. Data show that treating dental emergencies in hospitals costs ten times more than providing in-office preventive care. Prevention is a good investment.

We appreciate that you face a daunting challenge in balancing the budget. However, we believe this proposal will actually increase public health care costs and result in unacceptably high social and economic consequences for low-income adults and their children.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Howard I. Mark, D.M.D., President

On behalf of the entire COHI Board:

Robert Batch, C.P.A.

Jamey Bell, Connecticut Voices for Children

Adele Gordon, Community Health Center Inc.

Michael Goodman, D.D.S., and Margaret Ann Smith, D.M.D., Generations Family Health Center

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