

Testimony to the Public Health Committee

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Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee. Thank you for holding this hearing on access to health care. This is a area of critical need and I appreciate your interest. In particular I am here to support SB 1 and in particular, the fact that it includes oral health. My name is Marty Milkovic and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, a statewide coalition of people and organizations interested in access to oral health care. Our mission is **Oral Health for All**.

There is an Oral Health Care Crisis for HUSKY Children in Connecticut, caused by very low dental reimbursement rates.

Our HUSKY Children deserve a fair deal when it comes to oral health care.

Right now the State of Connecticut **pays \$22** per person per month to provide dental insurance for its employees, but **only \$8** per person per month for our **HUSKY children**.

The immediate solution is to raise HUSKY dental reimbursement rates to about \$14.50 per person per month, which is the 70TH percentile of dental fees received by providers.

Because of that rate, large numbers of our HUSKY children lack access to basic oral health care. Many are at high risk and their lack of needed oral health care will lead to more severe and expensive problems, even though most dental disease can be prevented or controlled. These children suffer, and we all pay for it.

The long term solution is to enact universal health care that includes oral health.

Most HUSKY children do not receive oral health services because of low reimbursement rates

In a 2006 study, only 27% of persistent ‘mystery shoppers’ were able to get a preventive dental appointment for a HUSKY child. 71% of children enrolled in HUSKY A for all or any part of 1999 received no dental care. Connecticut’s dental reimbursement fees under HUSKY have been frozen since 1993 and are less than the 10TH percentile of dentists’ fees and only about 100 out of 2,500 dentists in Connecticut provide significant levels of care to HUSKY children.

Talks to settle a nearly seven-year-old lawsuit against the State on HUSKY reimbursement rates have not fixed the problem.

Over six years ago, legal aid attorneys filed a lawsuit against the State for not providing dental care to children on HUSKY as provided by Federal Medicaid law and regulation. With no settlement in sight, legislation is necessary so that HUSKY children do not suffer for another year.

If Rates are Raised More HUSKY Children will get the oral health care they need.

Over 350 Connecticut dentists have pledged that they will serve more HUSKY children if rates are raised. 270 new dentists would participate and 84 current participants would serve more HUSKY children. That would more than triple the number of dentists caring for children in the HUSKY system.

According to Burton Edelstein, D.D.S., M.P.H., co-author of a 2001 report on oral health access for Connecticut's children, "Since (my) report came out, a number of states, including Michigan, Tennessee and Delaware have made dramatic progress in (raising and implementing higher) rates, proving that it can be done".

Oral health care can reduce costs for future dental care & overall health care

Dental care makes up only about 4% of overall health care costs and impacts overall health. Low income children who have their first preventive dental visit by age one are less likely to have subsequent restorative care or emergency room visits. Their average dental costs are almost 40% lower (\$263 vs. \$447) over a five year period than children who receive their first preventive visit after age one.

A 3-year aggregate comparison of Medicaid reimbursement revealed that it is ten times more costly to treat dental emergencies in a hospital (\$6,498) than to provide preventive treatment in a dental office (\$660).

So thank you again for your concern about access to health care. I strongly encourage you to raise HUSKY dental rates and to enact universal health care that includes oral health.

Thank you.