

March 21, 2016

Representative Nick Zerwas
433 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Re: Dental legislation
HF 2436, 2437 and 2614

Dear Representative Zerwas:

I'm writing in support of your three dental bills identified above, all scheduled for hearing on March 22. Each of these bills addresses much needed attention and dollars to funding for public program dental services for the poorest of Minnesotans. Access to care due to a low number of available dentists is one of the challenges and increasing reimbursement to dentists is an approach that has worked well in other states.

As you know, Minnesota has among the lowest State-set base rate reimbursement for public program dental services in the country. This low reimbursement is the leading reason why private practice dentists do not see public program patients. They often lose money as the reimbursement is insufficient to even cover the lab costs associated with some dental services. It is also a main reason why safety net dental clinics need supplemental funding and philanthropic support to stay open. Increasing payment for oral health care is also a good investment. Regular preventive care helps avoid more serious and more expensive treatments and helps improve overall health.

Last year, the Legislature decided to raise reimbursement 9.65% for services in counties outside the seven-county Metro area, although had considered stronger funding of dental public programs statewide. This year's proposal to similarly raises rates in the Metro area is welcome incremental progress toward better funding for Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare. This base rate is enhanced by other support. The Critical Access Dental Program provides supplemental funding for certain clinics. For 2016, all health plans for whom Delta Dental administers public programs pay 20% above the base rate. Still, the dental reimbursement represents an area where Minnesota can do better in order to pay dentists who treat those enrolled in public programs.

Corporate Address

500 Washington Avenue South
Suite 2060
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1163

Telephone: 612-224-3300
Toll Free: 1-877-268-3384
DeltaDentalMN.org

Mailing Address

PO Box 9304
Minneapolis, MN 55440-9304

The Delta Dental of Minnesota Foundation and other philanthropic organizations work to increase access to care and fill the gap left by insufficient public funding. In addition to giving money to safety net dental clinics throughout the state, Delta Dental of Minnesota Foundation:

- Recently granted \$4.6 million to Hennepin County Medical Center for a new dental clinic and add 10,000 more patient visits and statewide reach through telemedicine
- Funds a student loan repayment for service program to encourage new dental school graduates to practice in Greater Minnesota and to serve public program patients
- Supports the Minnesota Dental Association and their Foundation efforts as lead financial sponsor of their Mission of Mercy free weekend of care and other programs
- Gave \$3.5 million to the University of Minnesota to fund its Pediatric Dental Clinic
- Gave more than \$500,000 to oral health programs at the Minnesota Department of Health, including funding for its national-leading data collection project

Thank you for your attention to and advocacy for dental health and for the nearly 1 million Minnesotans who rely on public programs for their oral health.

Very truly yours,



Joseph P. Lally
Vice President, Government Relations
Delta Dental of Minnesota
jlally@deltadentalmn.org
612-224-3229

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500 Washington Avenue South
Suite 2060
Minneapolis, MN 55415-1163

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