



May 3, 2023

The Honorable Melissa Wiklund, Chair
Senate Health & Human Services Committee
95 University Avenue West
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 2107
Saint Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Tina Liebling, Chair
House Health Finance & Policy Committee
477 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chairs Wiklund and Liebling:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Conference Committee on the Omnibus Health and Humans Services bill (SF2995).

Founded in 1969, Delta Dental of Minnesota is a non-profit health service plan corporation administering dental benefits to over 2.5 million Minnesotans. Our company operates with a mission to promote healthier lives, and a vision to partner to advance health and community well-being by improving access, quality and innovation.

We write in support of three provisions being considered by the committee: 1) re-instatement of adult dental benefits under Medical Assistance, 2) funding for critical access dental infrastructure, and 3) funding for school-based health centers.

Reinstatement of Adult Dental Benefits under Medical Assistance. Delta Dental of Minnesota supports the reinstatement of adult dental benefits under Medical Assistance as set forth in Article 1, Section 9 of the Senate position and Article 1, Section 12 of the House position. Access to appropriate oral health care is important to the overall health and wellbeing of Minnesotans. In 2009, adult comprehensive dental benefits were cut as a result of the budget deficit the state was facing. Currently, adult dental utilization rates under the Medical Assistance program are significantly lower than utilization rates for children and pregnant adults.

We support this bipartisan effort to reinstate adult dental benefits and improve access to care. In concert with these efforts, we would add that it will be critical for the state to make the appropriate investments in the administration of the public programs to ensure that there are a sufficient number of providers to administer these benefits, and that the programs are sustainable going forward. Unfortunately, Minnesota is experiencing a shortage of dental providers, as well as provider hesitancy to fully participate in the public programs as currently implemented (see 2022 Department of Human Services Legislative Report, "Analysis of State Medicaid Dental Programs and Dental Provider Hesitancy").

The reinstatement of adult dental benefits is a step in the right direction to ensure adult enrollees have coverage for the appropriate care. Moving forward, we look forward to further conversations with policymakers on the interdependency of access and availability of services in our state and how we can work to solve these challenges together.

Critical Access Dental Infrastructure. Delta Dental of Minnesota supports the \$20 million investment in supporting and expanding Minnesota's critical access dental infrastructure as set forth in Article 3,

Section 183 of the House position. Improving the access and availability of dental care for all Minnesotans is in our shared public interest.

Critical access dental clinics play a pivotal role in providing access and availability of dental care to Minnesotans, especially those covered under the Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare programs. As mentioned, Minnesota is experiencing a shortage of dental providers, as well as provider hesitancy to fully participate in the public programs as currently implemented. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, 54 of Minnesota's 87 counties are currently designated as dental Health Provider Shortage Areas. The Board of Dentistry has cited concerns regarding shortages of dental assistants and dental hygienists in Minnesota as well.

Delta Dental of Minnesota Foundation—a separate non-profit organization—has provided charitable funding to nonprofits that operate critical access dental clinics in Minnesota. The giving has supported these clinics by funding the expansion of dental teams, spaces, services, and equipment for increased access to care. However, significant additional need remains.

Supporting critical access dental clinics is one tool in the toolbox that the Legislature can use to assist in addressing the state's access challenges. The investment included in the House position would provide funding through grants and forgivable loans to eligible and appropriate critical access dental clinics in order to sustain and grow capacity to provide oral health services to underserved patients. Given the ongoing needs in the community, we strongly support efforts by the State of Minnesota to support critical access dental clinics in our state.

School-Based Health Centers. Delta Dental of Minnesota supports the investments in school-based health centers contemplated by Article 4, Section 51 of the Senate position and Article 3, Section 119 of the House position, to the extent that such models can play a role in helping to reduce barriers to access for children's dental services and promote youth awareness of the importance of oral health care. Optimal oral health starting in childhood and continuing in adulthood has been associated with decreased risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke, and other negative health outcomes. Children with good oral health are more likely to succeed in school, as well. Dental-related illnesses cost students more than 51 million lost school hours each year in America, significantly affecting academic performance, overall educational outcomes and even success in landing a job in adulthood. Tooth decay and oral disease can also cause serious pain, affecting a child's self-esteem and their ability to eat, speak and sleep. By treating oral health as preventive health care, we can better position children to thrive in school and live healthier lives.

We know that the committee has many difficult decisions to make about how to best allocate resources as it weighs many worthy projects and proposals before it. We hope that the above information is helpful to you as you work through the process of your decision-making. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance to you in any manner.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments on the 2023 Omnibus Health and Human Services bill.

Sincerely,



Tamera Robinson
President Insurance Division

cc: Governor Tim Walz
Commissioner Jodi Harpsted, Department of Human Services
Commissioner Brooke Cunningham, Department of Health
Commissioner Willie Jett, Department of Education
Senators Morrison, Boldon, Kupec and Abeler
Representatives Bierman, Pinto, Keeler and Schomacker