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**Written Testimony regarding SB 541
Submitted to the Michigan House Committee on Health Policy
October 3, 2018**

Members of the House Committee on Health Policy,

On behalf of the 1,100 members of the Michigan Academy of General Dentistry (AGD), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Committee regarding SB 541. The Michigan AGD is a constituent of the national Academy of General Dentistry, a professional association of 39,000 general dentist members from across the United States.

I am speaking today to register the Michigan AGD's opposition to SB 541.

The Michigan AGD opposes the dental therapist workforce model, and supports the dental home concept, in which services are provided only by or under the direct or indirect supervision of a licensed dentist, as the optimal model of oral health care delivery.

SB 541 would allow individuals with three years of postsecondary education to perform surgical and irreversible procedures on patients. These procedures could be carried out under the general supervision of a dentist, meaning that a dentist need not be physically present in the building.

The level of education and training dental therapist receive is not sufficient given the procedures they would be authorized to carry out. Adults, particularly those living in underserved areas, often exhibit complex oral health conditions. Because of the rigorous and extensive training and education we receive in assessing, diagnosing, and treatment planning, dentists are uniquely qualified to provide care that is safe and truly comprehensive.

Moreover, the Michigan AGD is critical of the efficacy of the Minnesota dental therapist program in delivering access to care to underserved areas. Minnesota's program was passed into law in 2009, and the first dental therapist graduates emerged in 2011. Seven years later, there are approximately 90 dental therapists licensed, with less than half practicing in designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA). The largest share of dental therapists are practicing in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area, where there is no shortage of dentists.

Also, the Michigan AGD would like to emphasize for the Committee that access rates for children enrolled in Medicaid in Minnesota *declined* since the implementation of their dental therapist program.

In 2017, the access rates for children enrolled in Medicaid had fallen so low in Minnesota, that the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) warned that they were in danger of losing federal funding if no action was taken. In response, the Minnesota Department of Human Services Commissioner wrote a letter to the legislature, asking them to take meaningful steps to address access rates, and stated the need to address low reimbursement rates and administrative complexity.



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Rather than directing resources towards the implementation of an unproven model, the Michigan AGD asks the Committee to instead consider utilizing Michigan's existing workforce more efficiently. The Michigan AGD supports the Michigan Dental Association's (MDA) proposal to expand the P.A. 161 program, which allows dental hygienists, under the supervision of a dentist, to see patients who are not patients of record in underserved areas.

Additionally, the Michigan AGD supports increases to Medicaid reimbursement rates, which has been shown to increase provider participation, and will make it viable for dentists to treat underserved patients. Finally, the Michigan AGD supports incentives for dentists to practice in underserved areas, such as dental student loan repayment programs.

Dental therapy proponents are well-funded by out-of-state foundations, and in trying to build support for the dental therapist model, have been highly selective with the evidence they choose to present. The Michigan AGD stands ready to work with the legislature and agencies to implement proven solutions that will increase access to care.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony for the Committee. Please do not hesitate to contact the Michigan AGD if the Committee has further questions about the issue, or would like to discuss further.

Thank you,

J. Michael Owen, DDS, FAGD
Michigan AGD President

Colleen DeLacy, DDS, FAGD
Michigan AGD Immediate Past President