



michigan dental  
ASSOCIATION  
YOUR CONNECTION TO ORAL HEALTH

**TO:** House Health Policy Committee Members  
**FROM:** Michigan Dental Association  
**DATE:** December 5, 2018  
**RE:** Senate Bill 541

On behalf of over 4,700 licensed dentists across Michigan, the Michigan Dental Association (MDA) strongly urges you to oppose Senate Bill 541.

Michigan's underserved population, Veterans and Medicaid beneficiaries, urban and rural, deserve equal access to oral health care, especially if that care is surgical and irreversible. Michigan currently has the workforce in place to achieve this kind of access. Michigan has an adequate amount of dentists, a surplus of dental hygienists, and two dental schools that are each graduating over one-hundred dentists on an annual basis.

Allowing someone who is lesser trained and educated than a dentist to drill and extract teeth will not improve access to dental care in Michigan. Minnesota, where dental therapist legislation was passed almost ten years ago, has proven this. In 2015, only 37% of children on medical assistance in Minnesota received preventative care, and currently only 9 of the 86 licensed dental therapists are practicing in rural areas.

Minnesota has proven that barriers to accessing dental care will persist regardless of who is providing the care. Barriers to dental care include costs, like Medicaid funding, transportation to and from appointments, health literacy, and prioritizing oral health care as an essential part of one's overall health care. A dental therapist will add nothing to what is currently being done to address these barriers.

Michigan can do better. Michigan's young dentists, who are the most ardently opposed to Senate Bill 541, are entering the workforce with hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt, which prevents them from treating underserved populations. Many young dentists have a passion for public health, but Michigan's reimbursement rate for traditional dental Medicaid is only about 25% of the usual and customary rate. This low rate prevents young, and established, dentists from being able to serve the underserved populations in significant ways.

In addition, the MDA has multiple proposals to increase access to dental care by better utilizing the current dental workforce. These proposals include expanding the scope of practice of registered dental assistants, and allowing more dental hygienists to perform preventive oral health services on unassigned and underserved populations in the State of Michigan.

Everyone deserves equal access to the oral health care; please oppose Senate Bill 541.