

The Honorable Chair Senator Murray
Senate Committee on Health & Human Services
Rhode Island General Assembly

Re: Written Testimony on S 2862 – Limited Licensure for Foreign-Trained Dentists and Dental Hygienists

Chair Murray and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on S 2862. My name is Dr. Frederick Hartman, and I am an oral and maxillofacial surgeon practicing here in Rhode Island. I also serve in leadership within our state's dental community. I want to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to Senator Vargas and the co-sponsors for bringing this bill forward. You have identified a real and pressing challenge: Rhode Island needs more dental providers, and many foreign-trained clinicians already living in our state are eager to serve our communities. The concept behind this bill is thoughtful, timely, and grounded in a genuine desire to expand access to care.

As dentists, we share that goal wholeheartedly. We want to reduce wait times, strengthen care in underserved areas, and create pathways for talented international clinicians to contribute meaningfully to Rhode Island's oral health system. My testimony is offered in that same spirit of partnership. Our focus is simply on ensuring that we expand access **without unintentionally creating two different standards of care.**

Last year, this committee passed an excellent model with the international physician bill. That legislation created a structured, safe, time-limited pathway for internationally-trained doctors to enter the workforce. It required verified training, standardized exams, clear supervision, and a defined bridge to full licensure. It expanded the workforce while maintaining one trusted standard for every patient. It is a model of how to welcome international clinicians while protecting the public.

S 2862 aims to accomplish something similar for dentistry, and with a few targeted refinements, it absolutely can. As written, the bill introduces a new category of foreign-trained dentists and hygienists who would practice under a limited license, but without the same guardrails that made the physician bill so successful. The term "reputable dental college" is broad and not tied to an external accreditation or equivalency process. Supervision is required, but not defined—leaving questions about direct versus indirect oversight, scope, and responsibility. And unlike the physician bill, this limited license has no time limit and no pathway toward full licensure. It's important to have the clear guardrails written here into statute and not left solely to the Board of Dentistry to create regulations.

These refinements are not barriers. They are the same protections you wisely built into the physician model—protections that make the pathway durable, defensible, and safe for patients and supervising dentists alike. Other states, including Massachusetts, have shown that it is possible to welcome foreign-trained dentists into hygiene roles while still requiring them to meet the same exam standards as U.S.-trained hygienists. The pathway can be different; the standard should remain the same.

I want this bill to succeed. With clearer training-equivalency language, defined supervision expectations, and a time-limited bridge modeled on last year's physician bill, S 2862 can become a strong, sustainable pathway that expands access while protecting every Rhode Island patient.

Thank you again for your leadership, your commitment to addressing workforce shortages, and your willingness to engage with the dental community as we work together to get this right.

Respectfully submitted,

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