

March 30, 2026

RE: Written Testimony in Strong Support of House Bill 7838 and Senate Bill 2862

Dear Esteemed Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly, including the House Corporations Committee and the Senate Health & Human Services Committee,

Having practiced with, directly supervised, and mentored Foreign-trained/Educated Dentists, also known as FEDs, at Massachusetts Community Health Centers for 14 years, I feel confident in supporting these bills. Rhode Island would be wise to consider FEDs as a potential source of additional workforce, especially when pairing their implementation with an incentive to practice in the areas with the greatest unmet need.

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 7838 and Senate Bill 2862, which would amend Rhode Island law to allow foreign-trained dentists and dental hygienists to obtain limited licenses. By creating a pathway for these professionals to practice, provided they graduate from reputable dental colleges, work under a supervising dentist, and pass a board-approved exam, Rhode Island can safely and effectively address critical gaps in oral healthcare access.

I would like to suggest a modest yet impactful amendment to the proposed legislation. To broaden the scope of qualified applicants I would also include a Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) as an acceptable degree type, such that the bill text might read, "It shall be incorporated and authorized by its charter to confer degrees of doctor of dental medicine, doctor of dental surgery, doctor of dental science, *bachelor of dental surgery, or any equivalent as deemed by the board*". The BDS degree type is common amongst the FEDs I have practiced with in Massachusetts.

In most states, FEDs are still largely an "untapped national resource," as highlighted by Myron Allukian Jr., DDS, MPH, in the inaugural issue of the [Journal of the Hispanic Dental Association](#) (winter 2021, pages 19-21). I fully support this perspective and agree with his recommendation that other states consider "a pathway for FEDs to utilize their knowledge and skills to help meet the great unmet dental needs of our country".

Furthermore, FEDs bring invaluable cultural competence, which can help bridge gaps in healthcare access for diverse populations. Their varied experiences and often bilingual capabilities position them uniquely to offer personalized care to communities facing language and cultural barriers in the current healthcare environment.

Rhode Island need look no further than neighboring Massachusetts to see the immense benefits of integrating foreign-educated professionals into the workforce, as Massachusetts has successfully implemented a model that allows FEDs to obtain limited licenses to work in settings such as community health centers and dental schools.

Importantly, this expansion of the workforce does not compromise patient safety in any new way. The FEDs will need to maintain the same high standard of care as any other dentist in

Rhode Island, as House Bill 7838 and Senate Bill 2862 include safeguards—such as requiring applicants to pass a board-determined exam and practice under the supervision of a licensed dentist.

I will offer a word of caution: this policy change alone is not a magic solution to address all unmet dental needs, but it is instead an essential ingredient in a recipe that includes maintaining comprehensive adult dental benefits in Medicaid, integrating oral health into primary care, increasing reimbursement rates and value-based payment methodologies, investing in community health centers and safety net clinics, population-level prevention efforts such as water fluoridation, loan repayment and workforce incentives, incentivizing data interoperability, and enabling all care innovations that bring dental care directly to meet the patient where they are.

I respectfully urge the committees to consider the recommendations of public health experts and to support these important bills. In doing so, Rhode Island can harness the extraordinary potential of skilled professionals and ensure that its residents' dental needs are addressed with care and expertise.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to improving access to oral healthcare.

Sincerely,

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