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TTY: 771
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May 5, 2025

The Honorable Melissa A. Murray
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02908

RE: S 2878 – An Act Relating to Businesses and Professions – Dentists and Dental Hygienists

Dear Chair Murray:

Please accept this letter of support for S 2878, legislation that would allow public health dental hygienists to seek reimbursement for dental hygienist services provided in a public health setting from other insurance or third-party payers such as Medicare. Currently, public health dental hygienists are permitted reimbursement from Medicaid and the health insurance plans purchased through the State's health insurance marketplace, HealthSource RI. This bill was introduced at the request of the Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS).

Created as a licensure category since 2016 through the enactment of § 5-31.1-39 of the Rhode Island General Laws, Rhode Island's licensed public health dental hygienists provide preventive dental services in public health settings, including schools, homes, long-term care, and other community-based settings. Licensed by the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), public health dental hygienists were specifically created in Rhode Island to strengthen access to oral health prevention and early interventions among vulnerable populations.

Currently, public health dental hygienists can only serve Rhode Islanders with Medicaid. This bill would open the door to other insurers to provide this service for their members. As a result, older adults and people with disabilities covered by commercial and Medicare Advantage plans will have increased access to dental hygienist services. People who are homebound would benefit from a public health dental hygienist providing cleanings and fluoride treatments to help keep their mouths healthy and free from oral disease. Individuals with disabilities have lower rates of going to the dentist, and worse outcomes, such as tooth loss.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important public health legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jerome M. Larkin".

Jerome M. Larkin, MD
Director

CC: The Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
The Honorable Hanna M. Gallo
Kristen Silvia, Director of Legislation and Deputy Chief of Staff
Patricia Resende, Director of Senate Policy
