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***New bill seeks improved oral health outcomes in Ohio's most underserved communities; creating better access and jobs.***

Senators Peggy Lehner (R-Kettering) and Cecil Thomas (D-Cincinnati) have introduced Senate Bill 98 (SB 98) that would create a mid-level dental provider called a Dental Therapist and decrease restrictions on the scope of practice for licensed dental hygienists seeking to improve the health of Ohioans in all communities by increasing access to dental care. The bill is supported by the Ohio Dental Hygienists' Association (ODHA).

The dental therapist is supervised by a dentist working under their authority to practice in dental health provider shortage areas or in dental practices that accept Medicaid benefits. Currently in the state there are 88 dental health professional shortage areas per the Ohio Department of Health. In 2011, there were 59 professional shortage areas in Ohio; showing the continued growth of provider shortages across the state.

The Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA), an arm of organized dentistry, that oversees dental and dental hygiene student's education nationwide has developed accreditation standards for dental therapist training programs. CODA's standard requires the education must be a post-secondary college level curriculum of 3 full-time academic years.

The W. K. Kellogg Foundation reviewed 1,100 studies of dental therapist programs including Alaska and 54 other countries. The conclusion: the quality of the technical care provided by dental therapists, within their scope

of practice was comparable to that of a dentist. Mid-level providers are highly skilled in routine and preventive care. The studies demonstrated dental therapists provide quality care to underserved populations. SB 98 allows a maximum 36 procedures (routine basic care) vs. the 400 procedures performed by dentists (basic and complex care).

“SB 98 will increase access to oral health care for Ohioans in communities of need, where dental practitioners are typically not choosing to establish a practice,” stated Ann Naber, ODHA Legislative Committee Chair. Senate Bill 98 received its first sponsor hearing today in the Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee. Naber continued, “We look forward to a robust committee discussion to solve this growing problem in Ohio.”

Several identified barriers to access to dental care include:

- Lack of Medicaid or Medicaid coverage not accepted;
- Lack of dental insurance;
- Unaffordability of the cost of dental treatment;
- Long distance of travel or lack of transportation to dental office;
- Lack of dental providers in their community;
- Long wait time to get appointments.

Since 2011, Minnesota, Vermont, and Maine have passed legislation creating dental therapists and 13 states have introduced legislation to create this dental mid-level provider. To date, there have been ZERO patient standard of care complaints in Minnesota