



TO: Members of Michigan House of Representatives
FROM: Gilda Z. Jacobs, President and CEO
DATE: November 28, 2018
SUBJECT: Support for SB 541

The Michigan League for Public Policy urges your support of Senate Bill 541, which would expand access to dental care for children and families by creating a mid-level dental license for professionals commonly referred to as dental therapists. The bill passed the Senate with bipartisan support and is currently awaiting further committee action in the House Health Policy committee. The League encourages passage of this bill before the end of the current legislative session.

Senate Bill 541 would address significant gaps in access to oral health services by licensing dental therapists. Dental therapists serve as “mid-level professionals,” able to provide preventive and routine restorative care such as filling cavities. Under current law, only dentists are allowed to perform many of these routine procedures, but with the creation of this new provider, dentists could focus their time and skills on more complicated procedures while supervising dental therapists on more common procedures.

There is at least one dental shortage area in 77 of the state’s 83 counties, which means many including seniors and children are not able to access the dental services they need and often resort to emergency rooms for care. This legislation directly targets the difficulties of accessing dental services in both rural and urban settings by requiring dental therapists to work in shortage areas, at federally qualified health centers, or to see patients who are uninsured or who have Medicaid.

The League believes in a strong Medicaid program, and the addition of dental therapists to the medical profession will expand quality care to the nearly 2.5 million Michiganders enrolled in Healthy Michigan or the state’s traditional Medicaid program. In 2015, only 27% of adults on Medicaid had a dental visit and in 2016, nearly half of all children covered by Medicaid or Healthy Kids Dental received no dental services. Part of the reason may be due to the lack of dentists providing services to those on Medicaid. In fact, of Michigan’s 6,641 licensed dentists, only 10% of them saw one or more adults on Medicaid. By enabling highly trained dental therapists to provide care, more Medicaid beneficiaries will be able to receive basic dental care, fillings and simple teeth extractions—and will not need to resort to emergency room visits.

The League is proud to be part of a broad coalition of supporters who are interested in addressing significant gaps in access to oral health services and urge you to support SB 541.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.