



Alaska

Dental Hygienists' Association

April 10, 2019

The Honorable Ivy Spohnholz
State Capitol
120 4th Street, Rm. 3
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Support for House Bill 127 – Dental Hygienist Advanced Practice Permits

Dear Representative Spohnholz,

I am writing on behalf of the Alaska Dental Hygienists' Association (Alaska DHA), the professional organization representing registered dental hygienists in the state, to express our strong support for HB127. This legislation would make great improvements in access to oral health care by establishing an advanced practice permit for dental hygienists.

HB127 would allow dental hygienists who have practiced under supervision of a dentist for a minimum of 4,000 hours to practice under an advanced practice permit and eliminate the requirement for a collaborative agreement. The advanced practice permit will improve the public's access to oral health care providers.

Alaska DHA is aware that dental diseases disproportionately affect our state's most vulnerable populations. There is unmet need for oral health services in Alaska. *The Alaska Oral Health Plan (2012-2016)* reports high caries rates in elementary students as high as 62%. Children with special health care needs are at an even higher risk for caries and barriers to routine access to dental care. The American Dental Association's *Alaska's Oral Health and Well-Being Report (2015)*, indicates low income individuals do not obtain oral health care due to: cost (63%), afraid of dental work (25%), inconvenient location (38%), trouble finding a provider (22%), and not having original teeth (15%). Additional statistics report, one in three adults avoid smiling and one and three experience anxiety due to the condition of their mouth and teeth.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) selected oral health as high priority within the *Healthy People 2020* initiatives, as growing evidence associates oral diseases, specifically periodontal disease, to several other systemic disorders including diabetes mellitus, pneumonia, heart disease, and stroke. In pregnant women, periodontal disease has been associated with low birth weight and preterm births. A significant determinant of oral health is the ability to access oral health care. The USDHHS calls for efforts to be made to overcome barriers to access oral health care.



Registered dental hygienists (RDHs) are licensed professionals that are valued members of the health care workforce. RDHs receive their training through universities and colleges that are accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA). RDHs are highly educated and trained to deliver oral health care prevention services to the public, safely and effectively. Our national association, the American Dental Hygienists' Association, affirms dental hygienists are competent to provide dental hygiene services without supervision.

Eliminating the requirement for collaborative agreements is further supported by a recent report released by the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services, Treasury and Labor, in consultation with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and White House offices. The report recommends, "States should consider eliminating requirements for rigid collaborative practice and supervision agreements between physicians and dentists and their care extenders (e.g., physician assistants, hygienists) that are not justified by legitimate health and safety concerns."¹

Alaska DHA supports HB127, which would allow dental hygienists with 4,000 clinical hours the ability to practice to the full extent of their professional education and training. Dental hygienists with advanced practice permits have the potential to expand access to care, promote quality of life, healthy development, and healthy behaviors across all life stages of our Alaskan population.

Sincerely,

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¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2018). Reforming America's Healthcare System Through Choice and Competition. Retrieved from: <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/Reforming-Americas-Healthcare-System-Through-Choice-and-Competition.pdf>



April 9, 2019

Dear Representative Spohnholz,

I am a Dental Hygienist writing in support of HB 127 which may be heard in the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee in the next couple of weeks. I have been in Alaska for 35 years and worked in clinical practice, public health and as an educator. Collaborative Practice in Alaska, which I currently practice under at a long-term care facility, allows a hygienist to practice independently under the general supervision of a dentist. HB 127 -Advanced Practice Permit will expand access to dental care by allowing hygienists to work independently without having to obtain a collaborative practice agreement with a dentist to provide services, be able to bill for services provided, and refer to a dentist when needed.

Collaborative practice has improved access to care. However, many hygienists who want to work in underserved areas cannot find a Dentist who will work in a collaborative agreement. New ways of bringing oral health care to underserved populations are needed and why I am seeking your support and approval for SB 68-Advanced Practice permit.

HB 127 seeks to improve access to care by allowing a licensed dental hygienist, who holds an Advanced Practice Permit, to provide services to a patient who is unable to receive dental treatment because of age, infirmity, or disability without the physical presence, authorization, or supervision of a licensed dentist. HB 127 would allow dental hygienists to provide care to populations with special needs: children and adolescents, medically compromised individuals, the geriatric population and populations in underserved areas of Alaska. Licensed dental hygienists with an Advanced Practice Permit would still provide treatment as a member of a comprehensive oral health care team. This legislation would also allow an opportunity to revise efficiency and cost-saving methods to serve the underserved populations.

Please feel free to contact me personally if you would like more information or have any questions. Thank you for reviewing HB 127 and considering approval. HB 127 will improve access to the underserved thereby improving oral health, which has been shown to enhance overall health and well-being.

Sincerely,

Royann Royer CDA RDH MPH
Director of Healthy Smiles Forever
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