

**Written Testimony of Emily Flowers RDH**  
**SUPPORT of Senate Bill 280**  
**August 30, 2023**

My name is Emily Flowers, I am a registered dental hygienist employed by Van Buren / Cass District Health Department. I provide and facilitate our dental outreach programs in our communities, I also provide dental outreach services for Berrien County in South West Michigan. I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 280, Pre-K Oral Health Assessment. Senate Bill 280 will allow a dental provider to travel to schools and provide a non-invasive dental assessment on a pre-k / kindergarten student to assess for decay, infection, and more advanced dental treatment needs. According to the Oral Disease in Michigan report (2013), there is a racial and socioeconomic disparity in oral health and disease. Given the demographics of Van Buren, Cass, and Berrien Counties and the rural setting, the effect of untreated oral disease poses a significant challenge to the overall health and well-being of our children in our community. Long travel times between towns and a rural population creates a barrier to care that the county health department has worked to overcome by providing dental outreach programs currently. By requiring dental assessments for school we will be able to extend the reach of our services directly to the areas where there is the most need.

All students that have been assessed this school year were also given information on establishing a “dental home” with our community dental clinics to seek regular preventative care or treatment as needed. For many of these children, this assessment was their first encounter with a dental care provider. Extending our reach to provide guidance to the parent/guardian is also a major impact that the dental assessment program will provide. In many cases the parent/guardian of the student is unaware of the state of their child's dental needs. The impact of a dental assessment could expedite the course of treatment of oral disease in which case may have never been found, in turn limiting potential for major treatment and or infection.

I wanted to share my personal experience in support of SB 280 because of my devotion to public health. I am very passionate and eager to implement the mandate of dental assessments for school enrollment. Oral health is in most cases overlooked in regards to “overall health”. The oral cavity is the “gateway” to your body, if disease and pain are present in the mouth then disease and pain can affect other areas of the body. If assessments are required and performed during critical times during development then many problems and ailments can be eliminated before they are even started. Also, education of basic dental hygiene is given to students during the assessment process, which can be a beneficial life long learning experience.

In my experiences with dental outreach programs, assessments are the most important aspect of providing dental care in our communities. Identifying disease, need for treatment, and education are essential to reducing the amount of children with dental disparity in our state. A required simple, non invasive, and inexpensive assessment could be the reason that a student receives essential dental care that otherwise would have not been detected. A mandate of this bill will ensure that all pre-k/kindergarten students in the State Of Michigan have the opportunity to receive a basic dental assessment, provided by a dental professional. Dental assessments are and can be the first line of assistance with a student's oral health.

I would like to thank the chair of the committee for my opportunity to share my testimony and support for Bill 280. Your consideration of these matters and solutions is very much appreciated.

Respectfully,

Emily Flowers RDH