

House Families, Children, and Seniors Committee

May 15, 2019

House Bill 4223

Rick Lantz, Vice President, Public Policy

Good morning, Chairwoman Crawford and committee members. My name is Rick Lantz and I am Vice President of Public Policy for Delta Dental of Michigan.

Delta Dental is Michigan's largest dental benefits administrator. We are a nonprofit corporation with a special mission of improving oral health for Michigan residents. We achieve that through three primary methods: 1) providing benefit plans that encourage enrollees to visit a dentist regularly for preventive care, 2) funding projects that help ensure that Michiganders without dental benefits also have access to dental care, and 3) advocating for public policies that we believe will improve oral health.

One example of a policy proposal that we strongly support is House Bill 4223, which would ensure that children entering kindergarten have at least received a dental assessment from a qualified dental professional to determine if they have untreated decay and need to be referred to a dentist for a more comprehensive diagnosis or treatment.

In a perfect world, every child would have a dental home by age one, all parents would understand the importance of oral health and how to achieve it, and children and adults would see a dentist regularly for preventive care and education on proper oral hygiene.

Unfortunately though, that's not reality. The challenges we face with regard to oral health in Michigan and the United States are highlighted in a report recently authored by Public Sector Consultants, a Lansing-based research firm. Please consider these points:

- Untreated tooth decay is the most common chronic disease among children in the United States.
- More than 50 percent of children aged one to five and nearly 12 percent of children aged six to 11 years go without a dental visit for routine care.
- By the third grade, more than one-half of Michigan children have experienced dental decay and among the third graders facing oral health issues, one-half go untreated.
- Without appropriate treatment, conditions can worsen and become more difficult and costly to treat over time. Children may face nutritional, social, or learning barriers, in addition to pain and infections from oral health issues.
- A correlation exists between oral health and student success, with one study finding that children with poor oral health were more likely to have lower attendance and perform worse in school than children with good oral health.

- According to the U.S. Surgeon General, at least 50 million school hours are lost among U.S. children per year due to poor oral health.

The Public Sector Consultants report also underscores some benefits of a Pre-K dental assessment:

- Dental screening laws have the potential to address cost barriers by promoting good oral health habits and access to care at a young age.
- One study found that the earlier a child visits the dentist, the lower his or her total dental costs will be, due to the decreased need for expensive restorative and emergency care.
- Early detection and prevention not only benefits impacted families, but may also have a positive influence on state funding, as Medicaid accounts for more than 50 percent of all hospital-based emergency department visits attributable to dental decay for children. By promoting early detection and preventive care, dental screening laws may help to limit costs over time by decreasing the need for more costly procedures later in life.

The State of Michigan wisely invests in meaningful access to dental care for Medicaid-enrolled children through the Healthy Kids Dental program, which is administered by Delta Dental and one other dental carrier. Children enrolled in Delta Dental's Healthy Kids Dental program have access to approximately 70% of Michigan dentists. Unfortunately though, about 40% of enrolled 5 year old children are not utilizing the program to receive a dental exam at least annually. There are a variety of reasons why that is the case, but one of them is certainly that some parents simply don't understand the importance of having their child see a dentist regularly. A Pre-K dental assessment will provide an opportunity to not only assess the oral health needs of those children, but also educate parents about the need for regular childhood dental visits. In short, House Bill 4223 will help Michigan achieve a better return on its Healthy Kids Dental investment.

We at Delta Dental believe that House Bill 4223 could result in significant improvements in the oral health of our children, especially those who are most at risk for dental disease. We respectfully ask for your support for the bill. Thank you.

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- A correlation exists between oral health and student success, with one study finding that children with poor oral health were more likely to have lower attendance and perform worse in school than children with good oral health.

# Please Vote **YES** on House Bill 4223



Because oral health and a child's success in school are connected

Republicans and Democrats have joined Rep. Scott VanSingel in cosponsoring HB 4223, which aims to improve the ability of Michigan children to succeed in the classroom by treating dental health issues that are often painful, affect learning and cause kids to miss school.

▶ Under HB 4223, all children starting kindergarten in Michigan would have a dental assessment, in addition to the hearing and vision screenings that have been required for many decades.

**HB 4223 will help more children, especially those living in poverty, receive the dental care they need.**

▶ HB 4223 would provide dental screenings to the 20,000 to 40,000 new kindergarten students in Michigan each year who do not have dental insurance. The program would be managed by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

▶ The House Fiscal Agency estimates annual costs for screening all eligible uninsured children at \$1.6 million to \$1.8 million. (The funds would cover each screening, plus staff and program management at the state and county health departments.)

▶ Assessments for most children on Medicaid will be covered by the state's Healthy Kids Dental program, which covers nearly 1 million low-income children across all 83 counties.

**Large numbers of children entering school have oral health issues, including caries (cavities) and other problems that can impede learning, cause pain and cause kids to miss school.**

▶ Nearly half of all children entering kindergarten have had at least one cavity, and 50 percent of first-graders have dental decay.

▶ In some areas of Michigan, as few as 25 percent of children have seen a dentist in the past year.

▶ Children miss 51 million hours of school per year due to oral health issues—many of which are preventable.

▶ Tooth decay is the No. 1 most common chronic childhood disease in the U.S. (five times more common than asthma).

▶ About 37 percent of children ages 6 to 9 have dental caries, but the number almost doubles, to 69 percent, for children living in poverty.

▶ About 14 percent of children overall have caries that are untreated, but the numbers exceed 30 percent in at-risk minority populations.

▶ The rate of tooth decay among Hispanic and African-American children ages 2 to 8 is twice that of non-Hispanic white children (2011-12 Pew Report).

▶ Multiple studies have found that children with dental pain are significantly more likely to sleep poorly and miss school, and are less likely to complete all of their required homework.

▶ Kids who have experienced recent oral health pain are four times more likely to have low grade-point-averages than their counterparts who have not.



