



June 5, 2012

The Honorable Bernard Sanders
Chairman, Subcommittee on Primary Health and Aging
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
648 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders,

Thank you for your dedication to improving access to dental care and for sponsoring comprehensive legislation that aims to end the oral health crisis in America. Community Catalyst is a national non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to quality affordable health care for all. Community Catalyst is working to increase access to dental care and working with state partners on establishing a new primary care dental provider in Kansas, New Mexico, Ohio, Vermont and Washington. We strongly support your efforts to improve oral health by expanding coverage, creating new ways to access care, enhancing the workforce, improving education and funding new research.

Community Catalyst supports the legislation's systemic approach to improving access to oral health care services, including the legislation's extension of comprehensive dental health insurance to millions of Americans who lack coverage. We applaud the efforts to increase provider participation in Medicaid. Too few Medicaid enrollees are able to receive regular dental care because less than half of dentists accept Medicaid patients. Community Catalyst also applauds the legislation's efforts to improve access to care by increasing funding for additional dental services in community based settings such as Federally Qualified Health Centers and school based health centers. Improving access to care will require funding the expansion of community based dental infrastructure that is better equipped to deal with the needs of the community.

We are also pleased that the legislation contains policies to strengthen the oral health workforce. Nearly 50 million people in the United States live in dental professional shortage areas where they cannot gain easy access to a dentist. Therefore, we strongly support the legislation's inclusion of new demonstration programs within the Department of Veterans Affairs and Defense, the Federal Bureau of Prisons and Indian Health Service for the training and employing alternative dental health care providers, known as dental therapists. Dental therapists and other mid-level providers offer the opportunity to reduce economic and geographic barriers to dental care throughout the country. By establishing and funding pilot programs, dental therapists will be able to provide routine and preventive care to underserved populations as well as demonstrate their ability to increase access to high quality, cost effective care. Already, dental therapists are increasing access to dental care in rural and underserved communities in Alaska and Minnesota.

Thank you again for your dedication to improving oral health care. We look forward to continuing to work together to develop our oral health care system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Jordan", written in a cursive style.

David Jordan
Dental Access Project Director
Community Catalyst

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